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Daddy the Superhero

Value: Honor your Father and Mother

Brandon and Sean loved superheroes. They loved Superman and Batman and the Fantastic Four and dozens and dozens more. Their rooms were overflowing with action figures and comic books of all of the most amazing super heroes in the imaginary world and they knew their names and their stories to the tiniest little detail.

“Tell me the favorite thing you like about a superhero.” Mommy asked them as they settled in for their evening devotionals.

“Well,” Sean started. “They always defeat evil. Evil monsters and people who want to hurt innocent people are always wiped out by superheroes when they use their superhuman powers.” He said making punching thrusts into the air sitting on the couch with mommy in his footy pajamas.

“What I like is that superheroes are never afraid and always know what to do.” Brandon added looking into space like he could see his favorite superhero right there in front of him.

“Well I am going to tell you of a real superhero that you live with. We will call him SUPERDADDY.” Mommy said happily.

The boys burst into laughter. They thought of their daddy as someone who sat at his computer working, a shy gentle man with his hair starting to go away. “Daddy isn’t a superhero!” They said together.

“Well right after you boys were born, daddy and I received Jesus and now Jesus is in our hearts. You know that don’t you.” Mommy said and both boys nodded.

“Well Satan didn’t want us to have wonderful boys like you who would be raised to serve God. One day, daddy got up and in his spiritual eyes, he saw the house was full of evil creatures lurking around trying to find ways to stop God from doing His will in our lives. Suddenly from far away, daddy heard the trumpet call coming from heaven that was going to have war with Satan and his demons to defeat them.

Right away daddy put on his superhero armor. He used the sword of the word of God. And the breastplate of righteousness. Our living room was changed into a huge battleground between Satan and God’s servants. Your daddy led the attack charging forward shouting the battle cry. “IN THE NAME OF JESUS.”

The enemy tried to attack. They swarmed around him. Oh, they were nasty and ugly little evil things. They were angels who fell with Satan and demons and evil spirits like Jesus cast out of people in the Bible.”

“Oh mommy, I would be so scared to see demons like that.” Sean said his voice quivering thinking of how brave SUPERDADDY must have been.

“Well SUPERDADDY was filled with the Holy Spirit so he had the boldness of God in him.” Mommy continued. “He stabbed with the word of God’s word sending the demons howling from the battle. Once an army of evil things tried to attack our family and daddy used the super weapon of praise. Raising his mighty sword into the air, he sang the praises of Jesus and the evil spirits ran in fear from him. The fire of the Holy Spirit like we read about in Acts was shooting from daddy’s sword and the ends of his fingers because he was full of God’s power and anointing to fight evil. Finally, SUPERDADDY stood face to face with the prince of all that was evil himself.

“The devil himself? How could daddy fight him?” Brandon said very frightened thinking of the daddy he loved facing the most evil thing in the universe.

“Well that’s because your daddy is not only brave and strong and full of the superpowers of the Holy Spirit but he also knows who he serves. He knew he could count on his Lord to back him up. He pulled the sword of the word out and declared. “AT THE NAME OF JESUS, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW.”

“Just then daddy stepped aside and knelt putting his head covered with his helmet to his sword. From behind him Jesus stepped up and cast Satan away. Jesus spoke the word of God and banished the evil one from the battle and from our home forever. Then he put a barrier of protection around us so we can live here in peace and worship God and so daddy and I can raise you little stinkers to become mighty men of God just like daddy.” Mommy finished the story tickling Brandon and Sean and making them giggle.

“Oh now, you telling that old story of the battle with Satan again?” Daddy said walking through and smiling seeing his family playing together.

“Daddy we want to be superheroes just like you!” Sean shouted jumping up to him for a hug.

“You learn the Bible and how to pray and all the lessons you will learn at church and Sunday School and Jesus will use you boys to battle evil too. Just you wait and see.” Daddy said hugging them goodnight. The boys watched daddy the superhero walk away. To their eyes, he was just a regular dad, but even then, as he walked off, they thought they saw small flames shoot from his fingers.

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Sharks

Value: Thou Shall not Kill

Everyone on the fishing trawler knew about the dangers of sharks. When they brought their nets in, they saw the big dangerous beasts in the water feeding off of what got loose from their catch. Oliver's uncle Nemo often talked to him about the dangers before he agreed to let him work as cabin boy on the ship for a summer. Oliver was the only kid on the boat but the sailors liked him and he learned a lot about fishing from them.

The day the ship sank was like any other day. But everybody heard the explosion in the engine room and what it meant when the boat began to tilt because water was filling it from below. They had done drills on this often. Oliver was put in a small life raft boat first since he was the youngest. He held the rope that tied his raft to the ship hoping that soon his uncle and some of the men would join him. But suddenly there was a jolt as the sinking ship jerked in the water. The rope broke and Oliver's raft began to drift.

He called out to the ship as the rest of the men got into boats and they were yelling back that they would catch up to him. It looked like everybody got off and would be safe but the waves took him further and further away until Oliver couldn't see anyone any more. He was alone on the open sea in a tiny life raft.

Oliver knew to conserve his energies and he found the supplies and sun block to keep himself safe and healthy while he waited for rescue. That was when he saw the large fin in the water circling his raft. He knew what it was. The great white shark circled and circled as though thinking about what it was going to do. All of a sudden, there was a pop at the back of the inflatable raft. It had sprung a leak. At first, Oliver thought the shark had rammed him but then he saw the big fish several yards in front of the boat watching him so he knew it wasn't the shark's fault.

The boat filled with water and Oliver held on as long as he could. He knew his life vest could keep him afloat but he also knew that in the water, he would certainly become lunch for that big hungry shark. Finally, the boat collapsed and sank and Oliver floated in the sea watching the big fin not far from him. It slowly started moving toward him. About two yards away though, suddenly its head rose out of the water and Oliver could see its eyes and mouth.

"Don't be afraid!" It suddenly said. Oliver gasped and sucked in seawater hearing the killer shark speak but before he could react, it went under and came up between his legs so Oliver naturally became a rider on the big sharks back.

In moments, he was gliding along the ocean surface riding the huge shark like a horse. The ride went on for a long time but soon Oliver made out a small island. The shark swam to the island very quickly and found a shallow cove where he delivered Oliver to dry land.

“Who are you?” Oliver said to the big fish as it turned circles in the cove.

“I am Feratu, the great white shark.” It answered rising up and then going back down when his answer was done.

“I am Oliver, why didn’t you kill me?” He asked urgently.

“I could see you are a child and were in trouble. I cherish my children as much as your parents do so I felt compassion to help you. Sharks are not evil killers like you humans sometimes like to think. We gather from nature what we need to eat and raise our families, just like you do.”

“But I thought Sharks lived to kill. My uncle calls you a killing machine.” Oliver said confused.

“Well the machines man uses to gather fish from the ocean are as much killing machines as a shark is with his teeth.” Feratu observed. “Your uncle gathers fish to sell so you and your family can live well and have things to eat. That is not evil and that is all I do when I hunt. But when I saw you, I knew you were a youth of your kind and that you would grow and become a great man of God. To kill you would be murder. God has told all of creation clearly in his commandments, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Oliver was surprised to hear the fearsome shark speaking of the laws of God. “We have that same law in our Bible. You know the laws of God?” He asked Feratu curiously.

“God made the heavens and the earth to serve him and live by his laws.” Feratu observed. “Sharks live in the balance that the creator placed in the world. We respect our environment just as you should do as land living creatures Oliver. We serve the same god. And I serve the same great master of all creation that you do.”

Oliver thought Feratu was referring to some fish religion. “Who is your great master of creation, Feratu?” He wondered.

“The same as you, Jesus Christ the Messiah commands the sharks, the oceans and all of nature as well as all of mankind. He created us and put us in our place to serve him and make his kingdom great.” The shark answered.

“I know Jesus,” Oliver answered, “I pray to him every day.”

“I do too.” Feratu said. “And it was Jesus who told me who you were and that my mission was to save you. The laws of God were put in place by him to make this world as much like heaven as it can be. I work to obey all of God’s rules and if you do that too, we both will be serving the Lord we love.”

“I promise I will Feratu. And I will pray for you every day and please pray for me.” Oliver said no longer feeling odd asking a great white shark for its prayers.

“I will Oliver.” He shark answered. “You are safe here. I will go find your Uncle and the sailors and guide them here and then me and my friends will guide a rescue ship here to take you home.” And with that, the huge fish disappeared under the sea. And Oliver spent his time waiting in prayer and reflecting on his new brother in Christ, the killing machine Feratu, the ferocious great white who saved him from death in service to Jesus that day.

3

The Window in Time

Value: Evangelism

Belinda liked doing chores with her mom during the summer. Because she was out of school, there was lots of time to learn to cook, clean, mend clothes, all the things she will need to know when she becomes an adult and has a family and house of her own. This week mommy announced there were going to go in the attic and see what was up there. As mommy unlocked the door and revealed the long staircase that went up to the attic, Belinda felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness because it seemed like a trip into the past.

They had great fun in the attic all day opening old boxes. They found a big box of Belinda’s old toys from when she was a baby and Belinda just giggled getting reacquainted with her old playthings. Mommy even said she could bring the box down to play with for a while and then maybe we would give the box to the church so the nursery could use some of the toys.

Belinda was trying on old hats from a trunk from Grandma’s house when mommy suddenly found something. “Oh my,” she exclaimed “Belinda come look at this.”

When she got back, there she saw what mommy had found. It was a window right there in the wall of the attic. It had glass panes in it and a regular window latch so it could be opened for air. But it didn’t show the street outside which would be what you expect on that side of the house. It was showing something else.

“What is that mommy?” Belinda wanted to know. It was like a movie with people riding horses and wearing big cowboy hats riding around just on the other side of that window.

“I don’t know. It looks like a scene from the past, like the west because look, you can see the streets are all dusty and those people look like settlers who might have been alive back in the times of the west.” Mommy knocked on the window to see if it was real and to both of their shock, the people down in the western street looked up to see what that noise was.

“Mommy, it’s like they know we are here. It’s almost like this is a window in time, like a time machine.” Belinda said with excitement.

“I wonder if it will look back at other times. It sure would be fun to see David from the Bible fighting Goliath.” Mommy said and just like that, the window suddenly got very hazy. Then the fog seemed to lift and just like mommy said, they were looking out on a battlefield. They saw the young boy, not that much older than Belinda and he was facing a very tall man, much bigger than anybody they had seen.

“You did it mommy!” Belinda squealed. “There is David and there is Goliath.” She pointed out and in doing that; she accidentally knocked on the window. Both David and Goliath turned and looked.

“Let me see something.” Mommy said and she undid the latch and pulled on the bottom of the window.” Slowly it rose up and finally she got it open and they were looking directly out onto the ground not far from where David was standing. Slowly, Belinda and her mom stepped out and when they stood up, they could see everything. To their left, up on a ridge was the huge army of the Israelites watching what was going to happen. On the other side, behind Goliath was the army of the Philistines.

Suddenly David turned to them and smiled like he wasn’t scared at all. They came closer but Belinda couldn’t help noticing that Goliath was snarling at her mommy and her and it was scary.

“Do not fear!” David said to her. “Who is this Philistine to challenge the living God?” And then before they knew it, he swung his sling shot over his head and SWOOSH the stone let go and hit Goliath in the forehead.

“HE’S FALLING MOMMY!” Belinda screamed and she scampered back toward the window. Both Belinda and her mommy got back into the attic and closed the window as the huge giant crashed to the ground.

“Wow!” Mommy said. “I can’t believe we were right there. We were with one of the greatest heroes of the bible.” She gasped getting her breath.

“Yes, it was so fun!” Belinda said excitedly. “We could visit all the heroes of the Bible like Solomon, Steven, John the Baptist, even Saint Paul. I wish we could see what it was like for St. Paul.” Belinda said and just like that the fog rose up again and they were looking into a dingy prison cell. Sitting alone in that cell was a small thin figure.

“Belinda, do you know what you did? I think that is Saint Paul there.” Mommy said and she tapped on the window. Paul looked up and squinted at them and then he waved like they should come join him. Carefully mommy raised the window and when it was open, they stepped through and were right there with him.

“Welcome to my cell.” Saint Paul said. “It isn’t much but I am glad for the visits.”

“Oh Saint Paul, you are the most wonderful evangelist of all time. Aren’t you scared being here in prison?” Belinda asked.

“Oh no,” he said. “Oh sure, it’s dirty and not very good food and hard to sleep here. But this is what God wants me to do and when God wants you to share the gospel with someone, you don’t mind the bad things that might happen.”

“But aren’t the guards mean to you?” Mommy asked.

“Well they do beat me and torture me sometimes. But when God is inside you, the joy he gives is much bigger than any of that. They might even kill me one day. But Jesus was beaten and died for me and for all of us so it is an honor to go through those things for him.” Paul answered making Belinda and her mom feel so inspired.

“Saint Paul,” Belinda said. “I am supposed to on a mission trip with my youth group but I am so scared.” she said.

The great evangelist took the little girl’s hand. “You spend time in prayer and ask God to replace that fear with the excitement he feels for all you are going to do when you go. When you feel God’s excitement for reaching lost people and then you feel how happy he is with you for serving him well, that is a feeling that no fear or worry can ever match. God can give you the peace and confidence to do anything for him.”

Suddenly there was some clanking far away, like huge metal doors were being opened. “Uh Oh,” Paul said. “Looks like they are coming for me.” He looked at the big door to his cell and smiled as though he knew God would get him through everything as a victor, not as a victim.

“We better go Belinda.” Mommy said. Before they stepped through the window they waved at Saint Paul and blew him kisses which made him smile even bigger.

“Mommy, I want to read all about all of the adventures of Paul.” Belinda said as they walked down the steps of the attic to close it up for the day.

“Sure, we can read those tonight during our devotions.” Mommy said happily.

“And I have decided to go on that missions trip and find God’s excitement just like he taught us to do.” Belinda said.

“And you know what Belinda?” Mommy added. “I am going to go as an adult sponsor. All of us can learn to be better witnesses for Jesus, even mommies.” They laughed as the attic door closed and locked once again.

Bad Imaginary Friend

Value: Lying

Lots of us have imaginary friends. John had one and he talked to him every day. John's imaginary friend was named Duncan. Since John was an only child, he had lots of time for Duncan. Whenever mom and dad were too busy, he and Duncan made up lots of fun games together. They would play in the yard and turn it into a wonderful forest full of wild imaginary creatures. Sometimes they were spacemen fighting the evil Lord Gnulle and his army of mutants. Duncan and John always won. Other times Duncan would just get in his jammies and watch movies with John and make funny remarks about the adults.

One day John and Duncan were working on a fort in a part of the yard where nobody ever went. Duncan had already talked John into taking scrap wood from building sites near by even though John didn't really feel ok about it. "Go ahead." Duncan said. "Look, they have so much wood. They won't miss a few boards." John never let himself be had stolen the boards and Duncan said was ok so he took them.

At home, he got busy building the fort. Duncan said it was ok to use John's daddy's tools because they both knew that John's daddy wanted John to learn to use tools so this was a perfect way. Suddenly as he worked, John cut his finger. It was bleeding pretty badly so he ran crying into the house to have mommy fix it. As mommy was putting the band-aid on she asked, "How did you cut your finger John?"

"Don't tell her it was on your daddy's saw." Duncan whispered. "Tell her you cut it stacking firewood."

"But that's a lie." John answered his friend. Mommy didn't see the chat happening because parents can't see what happens with your imaginary friend.

"Don't worry. I have a magic dust and I will throw it on her to turn the lie into the truth." Duncan whispered.

"I cut it stacking up some of the firewood like you wanted me to do mommy." John said feeling really guilty inside and just then, he saw Duncan blow the magic dust.

"Well, I am glad you were doing something good sweetie." Mommy said. "Just try to be more careful next time."

Wow it had worked. John's mom really did believe it and when she did, it almost made it true. Well at least until John went back to building his fort and saw the blood on the saw. So he cleaned it up then the lie became the truth. Duncan and John worked all afternoon but as supertime came close, it looked like rain.

“We better go in and tell mommy what we want for supper.” Duncan recommended. “I want macaroni and cheese.” He cheered which seemed odd to John because imaginary friends don’t eat.

“Ok, we better put daddy’s tools up or I will get caught and be in big trouble.” John told Duncan.

“Oh leave them.” Duncan said. “We will need them tomorrow to finish the fort and this way it won’t take so long getting them out. Anyway, daddy never uses them during the week so we can clean up on Friday.” So John listened to Duncan and left the tools out. He thought about it later when he was watching TV with his parents and it started to rain but it was too late to run out there now and daddy would know for sure. Then, just like Duncan said, they used the tools the next day and everything was fine.

Saturday daddy found the tools. He called John into the garage. “John, did you play with my tools and leave them out?” daddy said holding his favorite saw. “See? It’s rusting. Was it out when it rained that night?”

“Tell him no.” Duncan whispered. “Tell him that he left them out the last time he worked on the fence and that you found them and put them up for him.”

“But that’s a lie!” John objected to his imaginary friend.

“I will use my magic dust to make it the truth like we did before.” Duncan reassured him. So John said what Duncan wanted him to and when he finished the lie, he heard Duncan blow the magic dust. Daddy stared at John like he could see right through him. John even saw daddy’s eyes shift like he could actually see Duncan and John got really scared. If daddy has magic and knows about Duncan, he will be in big trouble.

“Ok John, we will talk about it later.” Daddy said.

“We did it!” Duncan said triumphantly. “The magic dust worked and changed the lie into the truth.” John still felt really bad in his spirit and the play that day was not so fun.

“John lets talk about the tools.” John’s daddy said coming into his bedroom and sitting on the bed. Then he did something John didn’t expect. He picked John up and hugged him and let him sit on his lap. “Now, you have always been an honest boy and you know you can tell me the truth no matter what, don’t you?”

“Yes daddy.” John said feeling himself close to tears. “Daddy, I left the tools out. I lied to you in the garage.” He said sniffing a bit.

“NO DON’T TELL HIM THAT. WHAT ABOUT OUR SECRETS?” Duncan complained loudly but John didn’t listen.

“Who taught you to lie like that?” John’s daddy asked.

“My imaginary friend Duncan.” John said feeling much better getting it out.

“John, remember in the Bible where the serpent convinced Eve to lie? Well that serpent was kind of like Duncan because Eve hid things from those she loved, first her husband and then God. But God can see in our hearts and knows when we lie because nothing is hidden from him. God knows you and Duncan used lies to cover up things.” Daddy said holding John so he felt safe even though he was being corrected.

“Yes daddy I know. I have felt awful about it all day.” John confessed.

“Well, the Bible teaches us not to listen to spirits that make us sin. If Duncan is making you sin then its time he either met the Lord or you got a new imaginary friend. Maybe one that goes to our church.” Daddy said and then he prayed with John and John repented of lying and of listening to a spirit that told him to sin. He hopped down from daddy’s knee and ran out to have a snack with mommy.

“Oh and John?” His daddy said standing up from the bed. “Tell Duncan his magic dust doesn’t work because I could see him blowing it the whole time.” He said and John’s jaw dropped.

“You could see Duncan? And you knew about the dust?” he gasped. “How much can mommies and daddies see?” he gasped.

“You never know John.” Daddy said chuckling. “You just never know.”

5

The Rumor with Furry Feet

Value: Gossip

You wouldn’t think Christian people would say bad things about each other. But they do. At Eric and Pammy’s church, some of the kids gossiped a lot. Usually it was silly stuff but sometimes some of the kids acted snooty to some of the other kids in the Sunday School class even though Mrs. Wallace the teacher talked to them a lot about Christian unity and loving each other. Gossiping is not love, that is one thing the kids knew. But it happens.

Then a gossip got started that was really really awful. Pammy heard it from Nicola. Nicola leaned over after Sunday School and whispered, “You know Erin? Well somebody at school saw her with an older boy and....” she continued to whisper things in Pammy’s ear that just couldn’t be true. Erin was a good girl and the rumor suggested she was being very naughty with a boy. Well Pammy didn’t repeat the details but she told her brother Eric about it and Eric was very worried.

“Erin is one of our closest friends and she loves Jesus with all her heart. This kind of rumor could ruin her reputation and hurt her really bad.” But the rumor kept spreading and soon it got to Erin. The day Pammy saw Nicola whispering in Erin’s ear, it just crushed her inside to see what happened. Erin burst into tears and ran from the Sunday School room and didn’t come back for weeks.

Both Pammy and Eric felt awful about it. But they didn’t say anything even though they both imagined how Erin was feeling all alone at her house thinking everybody thought she was such a sinful girl and she wasn’t. That night Eric had a dream. It was really frightening and he woke up with a gasp and had to sit out in the living room with a glass of water to try to get it out of his head.

“I dreamed about the rumor that hurt Erin last night Pammy.” He told his sister the next day.

“What happened in your dream?” she was dying to know.

“Well we were at church and the kids were all whispering that rumor to each other. Suddenly, the rumor jumped out of the mouth of Nicola and became a monster. It had a huge round body and a tiny little head but huge lips on the front. Its fur was long and full of tangles and dirt and filth because it never cleaned itself. It had legs like a duck with big huge feet like bigfoot has and the feet were covered with nasty black fur and he could run really fast all over spreading himself, the rumor to everybody he could hunt down.” Eric said his eyes wide like he was dreaming it again.

“Then it started chasing kids down and when they couldn’t run fast enough, he jumped on them and fell on them with his big nasty fat lips and put the rumor all over them so they could never get rid of it. Finally it got to Erin and when it got to her, it ate her completely up and she was gone and we never had her in Sunday School again.” He finished. Both Eric and Pammy’s hearts were racing from the dream. While it was a silly monster, the damage the rumor did was so scary because they knew the damage was real.

“We will lose Erin if we don’t do something. We have to tell dad.” Pammy concluded. As soon as she said that, Eric knew she was right. When their dad got home from work, they told him everything. As soon as he heard that Erin had stopped coming to church he called Pammy and Eric’s mom in.

“We can’t let Erin get hurt like this.” He said. “I am sure Erin’s parents don’t know why she won’t go to church.” Then he told Eric and Pammy’s mom to call Erin’s parents and tell them what was going on and that they weren’t going to take it lying down. Eric and Pammy’s pride in their parents just burst from them. Then their dad called Mrs. Wallace and let her in on it. Before the evening came, a plan was in place. The next Sunday Mrs. Wallace confronted the rumor face to face.

“This rumor about Erin is false.” She told the Sunday School class. “You all know Erin is a good girl. Satan uses rumors to destroy the church and if we don’t stop Satan, he is going to destroy someone we love, Erin. We aren’t going to stand for that are we?”

“NO” the kids in Sunday School roared. Mrs. Wallace nodded to Eric and he went out and got Erin.

“The weapon that defeats rumors and the devil is love. We all owe Erin an apology and we need to pray that she forgives us, that we forgive each other and that God keeps us honest and helps all watch out for each other that rumors don’t hurt our brothers and sisters again.”

The prayer ended the rumor and Erin was as happy as ever.

“I had another dream last night.” Eric told his sister the next day.

“About the rumor?” she asked.

“Yep. The rumor with the furry feet walked into our Sunday School class to attack more kids and it was faced with Mrs. Wright leading us all in prayer. It grabbed its chest and dropped dead right there on the spot. Then from its useless body, beautiful flowers started to grow and continued to grow until we couldn’t see the filthy monster at all, just the pretty flowers that grew from its body.”

So their Sunday School class got stronger and grew closer because they knew what to do when God’s enemy tries to hurt someone in the church with a rumor. And now you know too so if you see the rumor with the furry feet, you can kill him and share all the pretty flowers that grow from his stomach with everyone in your class.

6

Fat Wally and the Piggies

Value: Christian Fellowship

Hi. My name is Roscoe. I’m a pig. No, no, don’t get upset. I don’t mean I am just messy. No, I am actually a pig. I know it’s a little weird talking to a pig but hey, get used to it, lots of weird things happen around here. You probably heard someone tried to tell the story of me and my brothers. I think they called that story The Three Little Pigs or some such nonsense. Well here is what really happened.

See me and my brothers, Gidney and Cloyd, well, just like you know, we all decided we wanted separate houses. Not that living together was that bad but Gidney snores so you know. So we made a game of it and all went to the market and got the building materials. Now the truth is we all used basically the same stuff to build our homes so all that stuff about straw houses and such, well, sometimes people get a little frisky with the truth if you get my meaning. No, for better or for worse, Gidney and Cloyd and I pretty much

knew what went into a new house. But the putting together part, now that's what stumped us.

Gidney loves to hang out at the at night clubs. He is a good mostly but he likes parties and all that goes with it way too much. That is where he met Fat Wally but we will get back to him. So naturally, since all of Gidney's friends were people at the night clubs, they all promised him and swore on whatever they could find they would be there on building day. So he got his materials and tools and aprons and big tubs of lemonade and he was already that Monday morning to get that house put up before the winter came.

Well, it turned out that winter was not really the problem. See Fat Wally was one of the guys Gidney met at the club and, well to be honest, Fat Wally was a wolf. Yes Wally Wolf, that's right. And they didn't call him FAT Wally for nothing. He got fat on lots of silly pigs that didn't know how to pick their friends. Wolves, as most of you know, eat pigs pretty often and Wally thought this was a good chance to pick up a piggy stew if he got the drop on Gidney.

Well building day came and about an hour late, Gidney's friends from the club were there but they only knew how to party. Oh, they talked like they knew what they were going but big talkers are not often good workers. They slung together the most shoddy, shaky house you ever did see. Gidney was so disappointed in what he had when it was all over with and all through the day, he could see Fat Wally watching from the woods. That night Cloyd and I came over to play Bible Racko with Gidney and we could barely deal the cards when that house started to go.

"Hey Piggies." Fat Wally yelled from the woods. "Pretty bad job on the house. No problem. I will help you clean it up when it falls and then I will eat you." He yelled. Big talker.

"NO CHANCE FATSO!" Gidney yelled back. I know, he should have said "not by the hair of my chinny chin chin" but the house was falling. He had to make it fast. We made it out the window and down the pathway before it fell. It crashed and we could hear Fat Wally looking for our bodies in the rubble.

Cloyd wasn't quite the partier but he went to a church that didn't believe in Jesus and taught something about a spaceship landing and taking them all to a planet that was kind of like heaven or something like that. They were pretty spooky but Cloyd hung out with them and just like the party people, they were sure they could help Cloyd with his house. But they showed up and started lighting candles and trying to talk to dead people and do spells that went nowhere and by morning the only thing up was one room because Cloyd and Gidney did that. Gidney had time on his hands what with no house left after all.

Fat Wally liked the look of this real well. Sure, the spaceship people saw him but they were sure the aliens were going to come down, kill the wolf and finish the construction so they didn't have to worry. They sure were confident in the spaceship people. Well the time came and they started chanting in a circle waiting for the spaceship to land. Well

when they opened their eyes, were there aliens in the circle? You guessed it, Fat Wally was in the circle and he chased them for what seemed like hours. They ran every which way knocking down that badly done shack and sending everyone screaming into the woods. Amazingly or maybe Fat Wally is just a really terrible hunter, he didn't catch anyone so he was pretty hungry by then.

Gidney and Cloyd both were pretty scared when they met me at the Methodist Church for Wednesday night worship. Afterward we made plans for my house and they would live with me which isn't that great because after all, Gidney snores but we already talked about that. I had about twenty of my good Christian brothers lined up to help and they were there right on time. We got that house up and it was rock solid. Fat Wally watched nervously from the woods but he knew this was his last chance with us.

He waited until we had finished and were having snacks in the living room of my wonderful new home.

"Hey piggies, how about a snack for Fat Wally? One of your fat friends would be a nice treat."

"NO CHANCE FATSO." Gidney yelled out.

"Gidney, shush" I said. "No need for that. We have God's blessing on this house. The evil one cannot harm us here." So Gidney, Cloyd and me and my church brothers and sisters began reading the bible and having so much fun discussing the word of God, everyone almost forgot about Fat Wally.

But I heard him coming. Step Step Step. He was trying to sneak in for an attack. He was hoping for panic like he got from the spaceship people. He didn't get it. We just joined our hands and started singing.

"Jesus loves me this I know..." we sang getting louder and louder until all of a sudden.

"OW OW OW." The fat old wolf started howling. "I can't stand it. I just can attack you when you are praising God like that!" Fat Wally went howling into the woods holding his big ears, crying and bumping into trees. And I expect as little as he got to eat that day, he probably is now known as Skinny Wally.

Well so you know, Gidney gave up night clubs and Cloyd quit the spaceship people church and we all worship Jesus now. We got their houses up and learned a really important lesson. We learned that your Christian brothers and sisters are who you would depend on and spend time with and we learned that the evil one cannot hurt us when we are in unity in the faith and are serving and worshiping Christ together. So when you are having fun with your friends in Sunday School, keep your eyes open for Fat Wally. If you see him, remember don't yell NO CHANCE FATSO at him. Just worship Jesus and he can never hurt you.

7

What's the Deal with Bruno?

Value: Humility

NOTE: Unlike most of my stories, the symbolism of this little parable is not spelled out. Be sure you are ready to explain to the children that Bruno is a type of Christ and Andrew a type for all Christians.

From the minute, he showed up at school, everybody knew Bruno was poor. His clothes were tattered, he never carried any money and his hair was never clean. Usually when a poor kid started school though, the bullies picked on him the most. Lots of the Christian kids hated that but they were afraid to step in. Andrew spotted Bruno the first day and he immediately knew there was something different about him. At lunch, Bruno was just having a side dish because that was all he could afford. So Andrew bought two full meals and took one to Bruno.

“Hi, I’m Andrew. I accidentally got two meals today. Can you take one?” Bruno’s eyes shone with appreciation at the offer.

“Yes, sure. Hi, I am Bruno. I am new here.” And over lunch, the two became good friends.

“Listen Bruno. Be careful of the bullies ok? They always pick on the poor, umm, er, the new kids and I don’t want to see you get hurt.” Andrew advised.

“I’ll be careful. Don’t worry about me Andrew. For anything.” Bruno smiled. There was that smile again. Usually poor kids did not smile like they were on top of the world. Bruno smiled like that. He was at ease in the school even when the snooty kids wouldn’t talk to him, bumped him or said crude things to him. He just sang a quiet song and walked confidentially down the middle of the hallway with a spring in his step like he could not be bothered by anything. Even those who wanted to bully him paused and watched him walk away like that totally puzzled and wondered, what is the deal with Bruno?

Suddenly the biggest bully of them all stepped in front of Bruno. His name was Rocky and even the bullies feared him. “Hold it right there.” Rocky said. “What are you so happy about? Not many people are happy before they get beaten up.” Rocky said.

“Hello, Bruno here.” Bruno introduced himself. Then what he did absolutely amazed the whole school. Bruno just moved slightly to the left which caused Rocky to move with him and that little fake gave him an opening and Bruno slid under Rocky’s arm on the right and continued walking toward the exit.

“BRUNO!” Rocky called out in anger. “FIVE OCLOCK AT THE BASEBALL FIELD, BE THERE.” He challenged. Bruno turned back to Rocky, that very happy grin still on his face.

“Happy to.” He said without a trace of fear or anger almost like he was making a date to play baseball rather than to be abused by Rocky and his boys.

Andrew called Bruno after school and tried to talk him out of going but no good. Bruno acted like it was going to be fun. So he agreed at least to let Andrew come with him. They approached the ball field and it was deserted. Bruno and Andrew started throwing a ball back and forth when the bullies arrived. Rocky’s friends filled the bleachers.

“Ok Bruno. No more fooling around.” Rocky said advancing.

“Oh I think lots of fooling around.” Bruno said and all of a sudden, he was behind Rocky. Rocky swung around and the super quick poor boy was behind him again. When Rocky turned again, Bruno smiled and patted his nose. The kids in the stands roared with laughter. Rocky swung his fist to hurt Bruno but Bruno was too nimble. He grabbed Rocky’s arm and put him to the ground and he did it over and over again until Rocky lay exhausted and not one punch had been landed. Andrew recognized the moves as those only a black belt in judo could have done.

Just then, a car drove up just next to the ball field. But it wasn’t just any car. It was a very special car. On the side the words “Van Pelt Industries” were written. Val Pelt industries was the factory that made up about 90% of the employment in Andrew’s town. The President, Steve Malone was a genius of management so everybody who worked there was very well off.

“Well I have to be going now.” Bruno said walking to the limousine. The passenger door opened and the tall handsome Steve Malone got out.

“All done Bruno?” He said happily.

“Sure am dad.” And the two started to get in the car. All around that baseball field, the people watching, Rocky and Andrew just watched with absolute amazement, as the son of the king of the town who everybody thought was a poor kid got into the limo with his dad. Before they took off, Bruno’s leaned out the open window.

“Andrew, you gave me food when you thought I was poor. Care to come to the mansion for a nice long visit?” He offered.

“YOU BET!” Andrew shouted and he ran to the car where they let him call his mom on the cell phone so he could go to the mansion. And why not? Who wouldn’t want to stay with the son of the king in a mansion with all the luxuries? Any of us would love to have a best friend like that. I know I would.

8

The Prince of Thieves

Value: Selfishness

This is the story of how the greatest pirate of all time, Captain Black met his end. He was the most feared pirate of all the seas. He was so famous that everyone called him the Prince of Thieves. Well, you know back in the old days, before we had our nice churches and such, Christianity was protected by monks. Monks are people who live together all alone in a far away place and pray and serve God. You usually see pictures of them in long brown robes.

Brother Andrew was a little different from his fellow monks because he loved the out of doors so much and the sea. He often camped on the beach not far from the monastery where all the monks lived. But he did good things, keeping the beach clean and fishing and farming which provided food for the other monks so it was God's calling for him to be on the beach. Especially the day the Prince of Thieves landed on those shores.

Captain Black spotted the island of the monks just ahead. He was pleased as he had his entire fortune on board. It was an ingenious plan to hide his booty on the monk's island, as nobody would look for it there. He was the wealthiest pirate of them all and his men were fiercely loyal to him. He gave the command to his men to prepare to land on the island. He would let all of his men go to the beach in small boats, leaving his big pirate ship in deep water. They would unload it tomorrow after they were rested.

Brother Andrew stood and looked into the setting sun. He saw the small boats making their way toward his beach. But he did not panic. He added more vegetables to his stew and more wood on his fire for the night.

"Ahoy Brother Andrew!" Captain Black called to his old friend.

"Blessings Brother Black!" The monk responded. Captain Black liked Brother Andrew because he wasn't afraid of him and always greeted him with blessings. Some of the newer pirates were wary of the young monk but soon all accepted him because their captain clearly trusted him. Moreover, what was amazing about it was that the monk trusted the notorious pirate.

"Arrr, I thought Christian folk despised low lives like us pirates." Scalawag Sam said to Brother Andrew as the brother served him more stew. "I figured the good people of the world thought we were better off not being in heaven."

"Well Sam," Brother Andrew answered smiling. "You have your prince of thieves but the church has someone like Captain Blood but we call him the Prince of Peace. And he came to earth to do all he can to make sure you and your friends all DO go to heaven. He came to earth just for you and all your crimes and sins have already been forgiven by him

so you can meet him and start your journey to heaven anytime you want. See God loves you just as much as he does me or the monks or any Christian in this world.”

“I never heard anyone say they loved me much less that God did.” The confused pirate said moving off to sit on the beach and eat and think about what he heard that day. The men all found places to bunk down for the night. But Brother Andrew and Captain Black talked by the fire.

“You should come with us Brother Andrew.” The captain invited. The men all like you and you would be the richest monk in the world.”

“I do not need riches. They would take too much time to watch and worry about. Serving God is best done without riches.” He responded.

“I have all I need. I have the love and friendship of my heavenly father which will last an eternity. I have the community of brothers, the love of the townspeople and even the friendship of notorious pirates. I have the secret I know about the pirates that the world does not know. I know that even ‘low lives’ as they call you are good men at heart, with loyalty and friendship to give and hungry hearts to know more about God and His Kingdom.”

“Ah you do have a secret and I’ll wager its one no one would believe from you. I must make do with fabulous wealth that is more than a king could ask for and the devotion and loyalty of my men.” Said the Captain toasting the monk who he considered one of his closest friends.

Suddenly, on board the deserted ship, a lantern left burning in the weapons room fell when its cord broke. The fire lit a small blaze that moved directly into the gunpowder room.

The explosion on the horizon lit up the entire sea like daytime. Captain Black leapt to his feet and all of his men were suddenly wide awake and yelling in panic as they watched their ship go up in flames. There was another explosion and then another and with each, the captain cried out like he was being struck with bullets. Brother Andrew ran to his aid and helped him to the ground as he and the pirates watched the ship and all of his wealth sink to the bottom of the deep blue sea.

“My booty! My wealth! My gold! It’s all gone.” Captain Black moaned. He looked at Brother Andrew who stayed close to his friend’s side knowing he must be going through so much anguish. “Well, at least I have my loyal men. Together we can build again and....” But when the captain looked up, the men were all gone. They had taken the boats and were already on their way to find the next rich pirate captain to serve.

“It looks like your men were only loyal to your wealth. That is not true faithfulness.” Brother Andrew observed.

“I need a treasure that cannot be sent to the bottom of the ocean Brother Andrew.” The captain said to his friend. “And I need a crew that is faithful to me, not to my gold. But is that possible?”

“Yes, there is a friend that is closer than any brother and will never leave you or forsake you. His name is Jesus Christ and he is the Prince of Peace, the perfect savior for the prince of thieves. I will take you to him and he will show you a wealth that is greater than a thousand ships can carry. And it is a treasure that is kept for you in heaven, where no fire, explosion or thieves can ever touch it because it is protected by God himself.”

The monk’s words put life inside of the old tired pirate and the thing nobody could expect happened. Captain Black became Brother Black, the newest monk in the monastery. From that day forward, there were two monks on the beach offering food, friendship and the gospel to the dark pirates and many “low lives” came to know Christ because of Brother Black and Brother Andrew. But never again did the notorious pirate Captain Black sail the seas for that was the end of the Prince of Thieves.

9

Horace the Hippo

Value: Envy

“What do you mean you aren’t pretty?” Terrance asked his friend Horace. Terrance was a toucan and since he was pretty sure he was very pretty, he felt sure everybody thought that they were pretty. But in his private thoughts, he did think Horace was pretty awful looking. Horace was a hippo.

“Well my mom always said I was pretty but then again, she was a hippo too. Terrance, hippos are just not pretty. Not like giraffes or peacocks at least.” He said jealously.

“Ok, well if you could pick one thing about a giraffe that you would want, what would it be?” Terrance said. Terrance, like all toucans, could cause wishes to come true for the people who they love or like a lot. That’s why people like having toucans for pets. It isn’t because they are nice birds. It’s the dream granting thing that makes them great.

“Well if my neck was long and elegant, why all the pretty giraffes would love me and I would have tons of friends then.” Horace said his voice full of envy.

“Ok, it’s yours.” Terrance said, he flapped his wings wide and then said ‘BAKKAH!’ which is the spell.

“Hey, HEY what’s happening?” Horace said in a panic as he felt his big hippo head begin to shoot high into the sky under the most beautiful giraffe neck that was growing from his hippo body. When stopped, Horace stood there not really knowing what to do with this much neck. Then, slowly at first and then faster, his head began to sway back and forth like an out of control carnival ride. His big hippo head was too heavy for that

tiny neck. All of a sudden, it toppled downward. All around the jungle, the animals heard Horace yelling for help as the ground grew closer and closer and then WUMP! It hit the ground.

“Murmph mr murtle mu” Terrance heard his friend say.

“Just a moment, let me get your head out of the sand.” The toucan said and he pulled Horace’s head back until it popped back into the air and he laid it on its side with that big giraffe neck just winding everywhere back to his body.

“This isn’t working Terrance. Not only is it dangerous, I think I look foolish with this huge neck attached to my big fat head.

“BAKKAH” Terrance squawked and Horace was himself again.

“I still want to be pretty. Like the Pelican with those beautiful long legs. They can even sleep on just one leg. I wish I could do that,” he said lifting one of his squatty hippo legs and then putting down before he fell.

“Ok, let’s try that.” Terrance said and out went his wings “BAKKAH”. Said the bird and the spell took effect.

“Here we go again.” Horace said gasping as he shot into the air with his legs growing long and skinny under him. When he stopped, he was standing tall enough to see over the grass. He peered down at his four pelican legs quivering trying to hold up his massive hippo weight. “Wow, Terrance, my legs are so pretty.” Horace said with admiration and he started to walk toward the marshes where the other pelicans stayed. But the pelicans didn’t see Horace as pretty because of his long legs.

“Yikes!” many screamed and took flight thinking it was some kind of monster. Other’s laughed thinking Horace had come up with a strange costume. Others ran to him with Band-Aids thinking he was the scene of a terrible collision between a bird and a hippo.

“Oh Terrance, nothing is working.” Horace said bitterly.

“BAKKAH” Terrance said flapping his wings and Horace was back to normal.

“How will I ever stop being ugly?” He said with great sadness in his heart.

“Horace I told you before, you are already pretty. When you say you are ugly, you insult God our creator. Way back in the beginning of time he made hippos. He made toucans and pelicans and giraffes and even humans and each of them was perfectly made for what God wanted them to be. We are not made to look pretty to each other. Look to your friends, the hippos and be at peace that you are what God made you to be. Envy is a way of saying ‘God you did a bad job’ and that makes God very sad indeed.” The wise bird counseled his friend.

“Well I don’t want God to be sad. I want to be all He made me to be, not what he made someone else to be. I want to be the best Horace the Hippo he ever made.” Horace said his big hippo chest sticking out proudly.

“Oh Horace?” Horace and Terrance both heard a melodic female voice sing out. Just then, Henrietta Hippo stepped from behind the grasses. “Will you take me to the waterfall today?” she said looking at him with big eyes that were full of admiration.

“Wow, she is pretty.” Horace said to Terrance and then he waddled her way doing a dance to make himself more pretty to her. Off they went as Terrance looked on in amazement.

“Thos are two ugly hippos,” he said to himself. Then he flew back to his tree to see if there was a pretty toucan there who might like a trip to the waterfall too.

10

The Broken Angel

Value: The Love of God

Maggie liked watching big storms. So when the rain was really pouring down that night, she sat in the front room with the lights off and watched it safely in her house. Suddenly she saw a small figure walking into their cul-de-sac. It was a girl. She had no coat on and the rain was soaking her hair and dress completely. It was clear she was crying.

“Mommy come quick.” Maggie cried out and when mommy saw the poor girl, she rushed out onto the porch. Maggie came out with her and as she looked more closely, she suddenly recognized the girl. “Oh Mommy, its Angie!” Angie was Maggie’s best friend ever and they had been like sisters since kindergarten.

“Go get her Maggie.” Mommy said wisely knowing that if Angie was upset, seeing her dear friend first would be the best thing. She watched her daughter rush to the street and embrace her friend and then lead her back to the porch. As the girls approached, mommy went inside and got some blankets to dry Angie.

“I ran away Maggie. I am so cold.” Angie said as Maggie brought her to the house.

“Come in. You will get sick out here.” Maggie said in tears so afraid for her friend. Angie came in and quickly mommy and daddy were there drying her hair and warming her. Mommy gave her some of Maggie’s warmest things to wear for a while and daddy got some of the hot soup they had enjoyed at dinner and the whole family sat with her and made her feel safe and loved as she recovered. Angie just looked at Maggie’s mom and dad in amazement as she sipped her soup and finally the shivering stopped.

“Why don’t you two girls go to Maggie’s room and play so you can settle down.” Mommy said noticing that Angie wasn’t talking much with the adults around.

“Why did you run away?” Maggie asked right away when they were in her room.

“I was so afraid. My mom has a very expensive display of glass angel statues. Well while they were out today, I took one down the play with it and I broke its wing. I think it was her favorite and I knew she would be so mad so I ran away. I was so upset, I didn’t know where else to go so I came to you.” Angie said crying again.

“I am so glad you came here Angie.” Maggie said hugging her friend.

“Your parents are so amazing. They didn’t act mad that I messed up their carpet or anything.

“Angie, parents are like that. Your mom and dad are too. Sure, they correct us. We need that. But your mom and dad love you no matter what.” Maggie explained.

“Angie, your mom is on the phone.” Maggie’s mommy called. Right away Angie got scared. Then Maggie’s mommy stepped into the room holding her hand over the speaker. “She is crying Angie. I told her you were safe but she wants to tell you how much she loves you.”

Maggie and her mom stepped out so she could take the call. Finally, she came out sniffing. She handed the phone to Maggie’s mom to talk to her parents and then turned to Maggie. “She said nothing in the world was more important than me and she wanted me home in my own room where I can be safe and with her and daddy.” Angie said looking confused.

When Maggie’s mom finished on the phone she sat down with the girls and helped Angie dry her tears. Maggie’s daddy came in and sat down too. “I don’t understand why my mommy isn’t really mad I broke her angel.” She told Maggie’s parents.

“Angie, you have to understand something about parents.” Daddy said. “Your dad and mom love you no matter what. When they scold or try to teach you, that is part of love because they just want you to grow up to be all that God made you to be. But their love is unconditional. That means nothing you can do will make you deserve it and nothing bad you ever do will ever make them stop loving you.”

“But I don’t understand how they can do that” Angie said looking to Maggie’s dad for help.

“That’s easy Angie.” Mommy interrupted. “It’s because that is how God loves us and how God loves you. God is your heavenly father and he made moms and dad just like him. In fact, God loved you and me so much, he was willing to let Jesus die on the cross

so we can always be in heaven with him. Your mom and dad would die rather than see you hurt sweetie. That is the nature of God in them.” She said holding Angie’s hand.

“But I love them so much. I don’t want them to die or sick or get old or even be sad.” Angie said emotionally.

“Then let’s get you home to them and when you get there, you hug them and tell them how much you love them.” Daddy instructed her. “Then in the future if you do something wrong, you tell them right away and never ever run away again ok?”

“I promise.” Angie said and then Maggie and her parents drove her home.

As she ran up to the door and hugged her mom and then her dad. Maggie said. “It’s too bad about the broken angel.”

But mommy just smiled and hugged Maggie as she watched. “It looks to me like the real little angel isn’t broken any more and will never get broken again.”

11

Willie the Billy Goat

Value: Peace

The animals in the petting zoo loved the times when the children came to see them. So when Mr. Henderson, the owner of the petting zoo, brought them Willie the Billy Goat to join them, every one of the animals tried to help him learn how to get the children to like him. At first, Willie didn’t understand why the children ran away from him.

“Yesterday that little blond haired girl started crying when I came to see her.” Willie complained to Chelsea the Chicken. “All I wanted to do is be her friend.”

“So when she came over to pet you, was she smiling?” Chelsea tried to help her friend.

“Yes and I did my very best Billy Goat things to make friends with her.” Willie complained. “I ran in circles. I butted into fence posts and rose up on my hind legs and brayed and then to really let her know I was her friend, I ate her dolly.” He said sadly having no idea why a little human girl wouldn’t like that.

“Why don’t you do what I do?” Chelsea advised her new friend. “Just cluck around and peck the ground but don’t peck their shoes. They hate that. Then if its time go to your nest and lay an egg.” She said proudly.

But Willie was pretty sure he could never lay an egg so he sought more advice.

“Well I think they are afraid you might butt them. Little girls are easily frightened.” Said Peter the Puppy. “But here is what always works for me. Next time we are all out

there, join me and my brothers and sisters and yip and jump up and down and pant with your tongue out and then when the children throw sticks, run and fetch them and then roll over and show your tummy. They love that.”

This seemed like very silly advice but Willie was new so he was willing to give it a try. Things started going wrong right away though. When the Children threw sticks, Willie outran all the puppies and ate the sticks which made the other puppies angry. Panting with his tongue out made the children scream the word “GROSS” which he didn’t understand. Then when it was time for all the puppies to play together, Willie started butting them which is how Billy Goats play and the puppies all ran away and hid and so did the children.

Willie was very sad and pouted all the next day. Finally, he was walking in the field where Mr. Henderson put the animals to rest from being petting and he saw Mr. Henderson sitting near the creek reading something. Willie walked up.

“Oh hello Willie. Are you having fun being a petting zoo goat?” He asked. Willie just shook his head because humans can’t understand animal talk.

“I see. Is it because the boys and girls run from you when you butt them and eat their toys?” Mr. Henderson guessed. Willie nodded.

“Willie, do you know what this book I am reading is?” He asked. Willie shook his head although it looked like it might be good to eat. “Its called The Bible and it has words from God who created us all. It has words to help you to Willie. See the Bible says that if we think about God, our creator and praise him, that His peace will live inside you and guard your heart. You want peace with the children don’t you Willie?” Mr. Henderson asked and Willie nodded his head very enthusiastically.

“It also says that you should make it your job to be at peace with all creatures. You can do that Willie. When you are with the children, find out what they like. If they don’t like butting, don’t do that then. Wait until you are in private. If they don’t like for you to eat things they own, try not to. But all children like touch animals and if you try to like them and find ways to get them to smile, they will love you. That’s the secret of being a very popular petting zoo goat Willie.”

And Willie learned his lesson well. Before long, he was the most popular animal in the zoo and the children called his name and begged for him to come to them to pet him and love him. Willie always made sure the children had smiles on their faces when he was with them and what he found out is that he began to love them from the inside. That peace and love of God that Mr. Henderson was talking about was really coming out. Willie decided to sit with Mr. Henderson when he read that book more and to never ever try to eat it.

Dorothy and the Dolphin

Value: Forgiveness

“Oh yeah, well you are the stupidest sister in the world!” Angelo yelled at his sister Dorothy so loud his voice began to crack.

“I am not stupid, Angelo!” Dorothy shouted back her face red with anger. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.” And she stormed out of the game room and ran upstairs to her room and slammed the door so loud the neighbors heard it and then she threw herself on the bed and cried. She hated fighting with Angelo but she was so mad right now, she didn’t know what she might do. To forget the fight, she turned on her TV in her room and her favorite cartoon TV show, Donald the Dolphin was on. Soon she was distracted by the silly, mostly ridiculous things that cartoon characters get to do.

“It must be easy to be a cartoon character.” She heard herself mutter feeling that she might be drifting off to sleep.

“Its time for Shakey the Shark to blow up!” The shrill cartoon voice of Donald the Dolphin woke Dorothy up. She sat straight up and looked for the floor of her room. But there was no floor. Under her were crayon colored waves of water but not water because she was walking on them. She panicked and spun around and everywhere she looked, it was the cartoon world.

“Where am I?” she said frantically trying to grab a hold of something. But everything was cartoon reality so it just squished through her hands.

“Why you are here with me Dorothy.” said Donald the Dolphin doing a huge leap from the Skalley Walley Ocean and coming down with a huge SPLASH. Dorothy actually saw the word SPLASH appear above the cartoon water and then it splattered everywhere. It got on her but she wasn’t wet, just covered in cartoon goo that quickly disappeared in the next frame.

“Donald, where is my dad and mom, where is my brother?” Dorothy asked trying to figure out right away how to get back to real life and out of the cartoon.

“But I thought you wanted to be in a cartoon, Dorothy. Ahoy, Chester the Chicken!” Dorothy turned around and she was scooped up on a huge orange and yellow cartoon jet ski. Chester the Chicken was driving and laughing wildly. The jet ski took off into the sky with just a swirl of exhaust and then landed on the road near Skalley Wumpkum Town where Chester the Chicken was mayor.

“We know you are mad at Angelo, Dorothy. Here in cartoon land, we can give you lots of funny ways to get back at him.” Chester said in a voice that was always too high and too low but never in the middle. ‘SHALZOOM!’ Chester said and a cartoon version of

Angelo appeared. Dorothy almost ran to him until he started popping his eyes out and turning his feet into springs. Then she knew he was just a cartoon.

“As mayor of Shalley Wumpkum Town, you are guilty of making Dorothy mad Angelo and so your sentence is SHALZOOM!” All of a sudden, a massive rock dropped from nowhere and squished the cartoon Angelo. Dorothy screamed but then he oozed out the side of the rock and popped right back into the shape of cartoon Angelo.

“Wowzie Zowzie, that stung!” Cartoon Angelo said laughing.

“Now you get to try one Dorothy. Make Angelo pay for making you mad.” Chester insisted.

“But I don’t want Angelo to get hurt!” She insisted.

“Well then I will do it!” Chester said and he opened a wood door in his chicken belly and said “SHALZOOM”.

An angry swarm of cartoon insects surged out of the door and went directly toward Angelo. Each one did two loop-de-loops and then stung him in the behind. Angelo started running down the road whooping and jumping. Dorothy didn’t know what to do. This is all so silly and meaningless. What she needed was some real wisdom from someone she trusted to help her with her anger at Angelo.

“Oh I wish I was with someone wise.” She said as she began to run at super fast speed on her cartoon legs that had turned into wheels and she passed Angelo but then shot off a huge cliff and was falling, falling falling.....

“Oh!” she awoke with a start.

“Are you ok sweetie?” she heard a very real human voice. It was Grandpa. She was dozing on his lap. “I think you had a nightmare.”

“I did Grandpa. I was a cartoon in the Donald the Dolphin show and I was mad at Angelo and they were making me do awful things to him and and and...” she started to pour out what she saw there.

“Shush little girl” Grandpa said as only he could do. “You are safe here now. You are angry at Angelo and you don’t know what to do?” He asked.

“Yes and I said some terrible things to him before I went to my room and pouted and went into the cartoon world and I felt just terrible and I don’t know how to forgive him and I know I need to ask his forgiveness and, and and...” She continued demonstrating that she had not yet learned to talk in more than one sentence.

“Dorothy,” said Grandpa. “You don’t need the magic of cartoons to make everything right. You have a secret super power. It’s called forgiveness. If you will forgive Angelo, your heart will fill with love for him again and all those awful feelings will go away.” He told her giving her that wisdom she had been begging Chester the Chicken for.

“But how Grandpa?” Dorothy said confused.

“You know how Jesus forgave you of all your sins and came into your heart?” Grandpa said.

“Oh yes Grandpa. He forgave me of everything and made me clean inside.”

“Well just go to that place in your heart where Jesus is and ask him to help you give the forgiveness to Angelo that he gave to you when he died for you and rose again. The Holy Spirit will throw that resentment and anger right out of your heart and you will forgive him in a deep place and then it will be easy to go ask him to forgive you.”

“I can feel it already Grandpa. I think Jesus has already given me the secret super power of forgiveness. I am going to go make up with Angelo right now. Thank you Grandpa.” She said happily hugging his neck and she hopped down and ran to the door.

“Isn’t there one more thing you need to do today after you make up with Angelo?” Grandpa called to her. Dorothy stopped and thought about it and then laughed her happy little girl giggle.

“There sure is Grandpa.” She said. “I am going to quit watching the Donald the Dolphin cartoon show right away!”

13

Stanley the Snowman

Value: The Story of Hanukah

A man wrote a very fun little Christmas song called “Frosty the Snowman” and you all know it pretty well. Why don’t you sing a little of it because I tell you the true story of Frosty the Snowman?

All done? Good, well what you don’t know that most of the Christmas stories you know about, even the silly ones, started as a true story but the songwriters change them some so they make good songs. Well that’s especially true with the story of Frosty. But his name wasn’t Frosty. It was Stanley. You have to admit “Stanley the snowman was a jolly happy soul.” sounds pretty silly.

Stanley was built by Jack and Susan and their dad two days before Christmas. Jack was in 4th grade and Susan was in 5th and they made sure Stanley had lots of good clothes to

wear and extra good things for his eyes, nose and mouth. See their daddy told them that an ancient custom tells us that if you make a snowman realistic enough, he will come to life. It's not a bad theory. This Christmas, you and your family see if you make a super good snowman and you might have an adventure like the one I am telling you about too.

Stanley did come to life that night. Dad waited up and watched him begin to step out on his new snow legs and begin to explore the world. Your dad is aware of a lot of magic he hasn't told you about yet so listen when he tells his stories. They are all true. Stanley didn't just dance around all night though. Before Jack and Susan met him Christmas eve day, he had build a very nice snowman home, a little house for his snow dog if jack and Susan were to make him one and a snow car although it didn't actually drive.

Jack and Susan were pretty shy when they got up early that morning and saw Stanley happily making his house. Finally, Jack led Susan out to meet the magical snowman.

"Hello?" Jack said timidly.

"Hello isn't a question." Stanley said and he put his big snow head back and laughed.

"You are alive. Just like daddy said." Susan said. "How can it be?" She gasped still a little afraid.

"Well Susan," Stanley explained. "Every Christmas, there is so much magic and miracle power in the air because of the coming of Christ, some of it leaks out onto silly snowmen like me." He bowed low bending at his snowman waist. "I am Stanley. I am here to play with you."

"HOORAY!" the children yelled and they stopped being afraid and ran and played with Stanley with all their might. Stanley was pretty good at finding games and they rode on his shoulders as he went all over town, meeting their friends and teachers and the Minister at their church too.

"I have heard of the Christmas miracle." Pastor Kelly said, "but you are a whole different kind of miracle aren't you Stanley?" He laughed.

As the sun went down, it was finally Christmas Eve. Jack and Susan sipped hot cocoa mommy made inside of Stanley's wonderful snowman house. "You are the best Christmas present ever Stanley." Susan said and she hugged his neck getting snow on her cheeks.

"But there are so many wonderful presents to have Susan. What would be the best present in the whole world?" Stanley asked.

"I don't know Stanley" Jack said feeling confused a little.

“Well let’s go see.” The magical snowman said. Just like that, they were flying through the night sky just like Santa but holding onto Stanley snow hands for all they could. They stopped at a big palace of a mighty king. “These children have a castle and they are princes and princesses. Maybe I should make you the kings kids for a Christmas present.” He said loudly so the guards nearby got nervous.

“No,” Susan said shyly. I wouldn’t be able to run and play with everyone, just other princesses, I wouldn’t like that. Show us more.”

And Stanley did. They flew like the wind passing birds and airplanes and knocking on the windows to spell out Merry Christmas in the frost as they flew next to them going wherever Stanley wanted to go. They saw children who go wonderful stables full of horses, others that got starring roles in the best movies just because their parents were powerful and rich. They even met children who wished to become an eagle and fly high in the sky or any animal they wanted and the magic of Christmas made it all so. Stanley said because of the powerful magic of Christmas, all of these things could be theirs. Jack and Susan loved the wonderful travel and seeing so many amazing and exotic things but finally Susan said. “Stanley can we go home?”

Back at their back yard, Stanley served them cookies in his little home again. “But why don’t you want the most expensive presents and ponies and all these things. After all, Christmas brings that kind of magic.” He asked.

“Well,” Jack said. “The more we flew, the more I knew it wouldn’t be Christmas unless it was with our mommy and our daddy in our little house with regular presents. Somehow, those presents don’t mean Christmas to me.

“Me too, Stanley. Something was missing from all that and that thing, whatever it is, makes Christmas wonderful.”

“Then I know the most special present of all that will make Christmas more special than ever before.” Stanley said with a big snowman smile and he clapped his hands. Instantly Jack and Susan were in a stable. They saw Mary and Joseph looking down. And then Joseph signaled that it was their turn to look.

“Jack,” Susan said gasping with awe and wonder at where they were. “It’s the baby Jesus.” And they stepped up and looked down at his innocent eyes and his sweet smile. Jack even reached down and stroked his cheek. For his whole life, Jack never forgot how the skin of the newborn savior felt. Outside of the stable, they ran to Stanley.

“This is the present that is better than any we have seen tonight.” Jack said happily.

“That’s because God gave this present to give us life that can never end.” Stanley explained. “Horses would go away, mansions would decay, toys would break or you would grow out of all those things. But life eternal is something you will never stop using.”

“It feels like it really is Christmas now Stanley!” Susan said loudly and with that, they were instantly on their porch.

“You know it all along that nothing could compare with Jesus for the best Christmas present ever didn’t you?” Jack said to Stanley.

“Yes Jack and I knew you knew it too. It was fun having an adventure but now its time to worship the new born king.”

“But we don’t want you to go Stanley.” Susan said with a small sob.

“I won’t be far away. Next Christmas build a snowman twice as good and we will have adventures a hundred times better than these. But just like this Christmas Eve, we will end each night worshipping Jesus for saving all people from their sins.”

“HOORAY!” the kids shouted and they gave final snowy kisses and hugs to their wonderful friend and ran inside to get on their best Christmas outfit’s to go to church and truly praise Jesus for coming to fill their lives with love and the joy of Christmas every year.

14

What the Drummer Boy Didn’t Know

Value: The Story of Hanukah

The children of the shepherds waited eagerly not far from Bethlehem to hear the story of their parents visit to see the Christ child. Little Johannes sat on the hill watching the tiny barn in the valley where they say the miracle baby was just born. But instead of his parents, a small boy came out carrying a drum and made his way up the hill.

“Oh hello.” The little drummer boy said when he saw the young shepherd boy. “I am Amahl.”

“I am Johannes.” The shepherd introduced himself. “Have you been to see the Christ child?”

“Yes, I traveled here with the wise men from the east. I could not afford a gift so they let me play my drum for him. I will never forget it.” Amahl told his new friend sitting next to him in the snow.

“Yes, I want to see the messiah so much. It is the greatest miracle to come to our people since the Hanukah miracle.” Johannes reflected.

“I am not part of your proud Hebrew tradition.” Amahl confessed. “What is this story of Hanukah?”

So Amahl began to draw pictures in the snow to tell the story. “A long time ago, over hundred and fifty years ago to be exact, the Hebrew people were being treated very cruelly by bad men who were the government. They did not respect our religion and they destroyed our temple and put filthy things that made our temple unholy on our alters and killed many many people”

“Oh that must have been terrible.” Amahl observed. “Stories are told of this horrible treatment around the world. The wise men who brought me talked of them during the long ride to Bethlehem. They said a great champion saved your people.”

“Yes, that’s true. His name was Judas Maccabeus and God gave him great victories over our oppressors. He was able to defeat armies of ten thousand with just a few hundred soldiers just like the great deliverers of history did. It was truly a show of how faithful and protective God is of his people.” Johannes continued.

“So you celebrate Hanukah because of the miracle of deliverance that God did through Judas Maccabeus?” Wondered Amahl.

“Well there’s more to the story.” Amahl continued happy to be able to tell the story of the Hanukah miracle. “Judas Maccabeas drove the oppressors from our land. Our priests and valiant men took the temple back as the battle raged. In the temple there is a flame that is to burn for eternity. It represents that God is present in the temple and He will never leave us or forsake us. When our priests reentered the temple that day, they found the lamp still burning despite the horrible things the enemy had done to our holy places. It showed us for sure that God never left us and will never leave us, even when we suffer.” Johannes said sound much like his father when the story is told each year in their home.

“This is a wonderful God you have. I wish all the peoples of the world could come to Him.” Amahl said sadly.

“The miracle of Hanukah shows that God will save his people no matter what. The priests found there was only enough oil for one day left for the lamp to continue to burn. Because they had to stay in the temple as the battle raged on, there was no way they could go find oil for the lamp and yet that lamp was God’s presence with us. For eight days they waited to get out to get more oil.” Amahl said whispering in awe.

“And the lamp? Did God’s presence lift because the oil ran out?” Johannes asked eagerly.

“NO!” Amahl said triumphantly, “The lamp burned for eight days on one days worth of oil. That is the miracle of Hanukah and why we celebrate each year for eight days to commemorate that God would not let his spirit lift from us even though supplies were not available to keep the lamp burning. Our God is not bound by missing oil or anything. He

has the power to do miracles for all of his people. And now he has done the greatest miracle, he has sent His only son, Jesus to save all people so we all can be his children.”

“As we traveled.” Amahl said, “the wise men spoke of salvation for all people too. Isn’t your God just the God of the Hebrews and didn’t Jesus just come to save the Jews just as Judas Maccabee saved the Jewish people from outsiders?” He asked confused.

Amahl face lit up because he suddenly understood why Hanukah and Christmas are about the same thing. “The miracle of the Christ child is like Hanukah. Just as God declared in Hanukah that his presence will always be with us, now even more is God coming to be our friend and savior because God himself has come, not just oil from him or blessing but God himself has come to be with us forever. And the miracle is greater still because as the angel choir sang, his salvation is for all people, the Jews, the wise men from the east, you Amahl, all people can receive the salvation from God.”

Both boys got goose bumps from the amazing thing they learned about God. And on that very first Christmas night, Jew and non Jew alike joined hands and accepted the gift of life from Jesus just like you and your family have done and people in your community will continue to do as you tell them the story of the amazing miracle of God’s blessings shown in Hanukah and in the coming of his son, our savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

15

Baby Polar Bears

Value: Helping the Poor

The one thing Pudgy and the older baby polar bears he played with loved to do is explore. Sometimes their moms and dads let them go out in a pack and explore the many coves and hills that made up their beautiful polar world. They made sure to stick together mostly but often split up in small packs of two to explore several coves at a time. That often turned into a game of hunt and catch with the smaller packs attacking each other playfully and wrestling and sometimes falling into the frigid ocean as they played. They loved the cold water and it made them even more playful.

Pudgy really liked being with his friends, Boris, Hector and Philippe and playing all day while the adults did whatever it is that adults do. One day they had found a whole area of coastline that they had not explored so they were very excited. Suddenly as Pudgy and Boris were playing tag in the water, they heard Hector yell out with excitement “HEY LOOK WHAT I FOUND!”

All of the baby bears ran as fast as they could to his voice. Pudgy’s feet kept slipping on the ice and he would bounce on his fat belly and then get up but he was used to that. That was how he ran. All of them stopped and just gasp at what Hector had found. He was standing on the edge of a small cove that was almost completely hidden from the sea or other inlets around it and the fish were so plentiful, they were almost jumping onto the

shore to be eaten. Boris was standing over a huge stack of fish he had already pulled out for his snack. He looked up and smiled and then yelled “WELL COME ON IN!”

The boys went wild fishing and catching the biggest, fattest fish and eating as fast as they could as though this paradise was going to disappear any second. Soon they were lying on the side of the water moaning for being so full. They napped and got back to their families before they were missed. For the next week, the four happy polar bears snuck off to their secret cove and stuffed themselves full on the amazing abundance of fish in that cove. To a polar bear, an unlimited quantity of fish is like unlimited money or gold is to humans so you can imagine how much they wanted to keep it all for themselves.

On the eighth day of the feast, finally as they lay there groaning, Philippe said, “You know, I don’t feel right keeping this to ourselves. Our parents work so hard to hunt for food for us and when I get home, I am not even hungry any more. I know all of our parents are pretty rich but maybe we should share this with our families.

“I think we should share it with the poor families in our community.” Philippe suddenly announced. “You know Georgio’s mom? She is raising 10 cubs herself and her husband was killed by that fishing trawler so it’s hard for her to find enough fish. I want to share with them.” Quietly Pudgy thought that was a good idea but the other bears got very upset.

“All those cubs will eat it all gone and there will be none left for us!” Hector worried.

“They can have our scraps but they shouldn’t get the best. They are poor. They wouldn’t know what to do with all this wealth. They would just waste it.” Boris added and they threw snowballs at Philippe for such a dumb idea. Pudgy felt bad for now defending Philippe who had to take that abuse all alone. All the way home, they taunted him when finally Pudgy spoke up.

“I don’t think we know best about this. Let’s consult King Marcos. He will know what to do.” He advised.

King Marcos was the wise head of the polar bear community and it was well known he would help them see what God would have them do with the fortune. Boris and Hector knew that their parents were on some committees with King Marcos so they would advise him that the wealthy deserve this amazing discovery and that the poor should just have the left overs. The day came for the little bears to go in and see King Marcos but the rest were all scared so they made Pudgy go in and tell him what they found. When he came out, all of the little bears were on fire with curiosity but all Pudgy said was. “I just told him what we found. I told him both sides of our talks about what to do with it all and he just thanked me and said he would decide before the Polar Bear Council this Friday.

The Polar Bear council was where King Marcos gathered every single bear in the community and told them of his recent decisions, news that concerns the community and

his rulings. The meeting went on and on and on and the four baby bears were so bored but they stayed to hear his decision.

“And now I want to tell you of four baby bears who are setting an example of how to serve God and their fellow bears.” The king finally announced. “These four bears found a treasure trove of fish, enough to feed all of us for many generations to come. They did not hoard it for themselves but they want to share it with all of us. Come up here boys.” He said signaling to the four little bears to join him on the flat rise where he did his announcements.

“These four baby bears have given their find, which they could have kept hidden for themselves, to the community and it is my decision that the first to visit the cove will be the poorest amongst us. I decided this because this is what our great God who created all living things would want and I know that in their hearts, these wonderful boys want to serve God more than anything. They have truly brought a miracle from God to us and God will reward them mightily.” The roar of approval that went up from all the bears in the community was thunderous. Each baby polar bear could look out and see their families and see them beam with pride for them.

All of the boys were blushing but when Pudgy looked over at Hector and Boris, he knew that in their hearts they were both unhappy with the decision but also embarrassed because they were being praised for their love of the poor but they secretly didn’t want to serve. The meeting ended and the four little bears met privately.

“I am sorry I didn’t encourage us to give the fish to the poor.” Boris said. “Pudgy, you and Philippe were right. We don’t deserve these praises and yet somehow we feel proud that it turned out this way.”

“Its ok Boris” a voice came from behind them and King Marcos had walked up and put his huge paws on their heads to give them some pats of appreciation. “Even if you had your doubts, you did the right thing. And because you overcame selfishness to serve God, your sacrifice is even more wonderful. Forget your sins and praise God that you are going to be a good little polar bear from this day forward.”

And from that day forward all of the little bears were the best citizens of the community and they knew that even better than the fish, the episode at the cove taught them how to be humble and know God’s heart for the poor and that lesson was more valuable than all the wealth in the universe.

16
Rubik’s Cube
Value: Missions

Paul did not want to go on the mission trip to Ghana. He was absolutely terrified of going. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Olson had gone on many such trips and knew the joys

that came from the hardships and especially the joys of sharing Jesus with people who wanted to know him so very much. So they made him go even though he pouted and looked very afraid all the way over on the plane no matter what mommy and daddy said to comfort him.

When they arrived and got settled, everything Paul was afraid of turned out to be true. He hated it all. They didn't have a nice hotel room to stay in. They had a hut. The food was weird and hard to eat and made of things American kids don't eat. The people looked funny, didn't speak English and they even smelled strange to Paul. None of the events or work assignments they got were fun to Paul and he felt sick a lot because he didn't like the food and didn't sleep well. Noises in the night there were so different from home.

So Paul just stayed in his hut every day as his parents went out and ministered to the people of the village. No matter how many wonderful stories he heard of God's miracles and the fun they were having getting to know the people, Paul was stubborn and he would not leave his hut. He just sat there day in and day out and played with his Rubik's cube. He loved that toy. It was very good for keeping his mind off of his surroundings and trying to solve it which he never did.

One Thursday morning, Paul got up and ate with his parents. He noticed that either they were starting to serve American food or he was getting used to the stuff they cooked here because he kind of liked it and ate lots more than usual. Right on schedule then, Paul's parents left to start the day's work of building homes and buildings for the new church, teaching the people and working on Bible translations. Paul went to his bed and looked for his Rubik's cube to start his day too.

But he could not find it. Where could it be? It was his best friend in this lonely place. He looked under his bedding, in his suitcase, everywhere. He was just frantic. He started looking all around the hut, even outside the windows on the off chance it got thrown out there. Then he remembered. The night before his mom asked him to leave for a while so she could clean up so he went out and found a tree stump down the hill from the hut area and he had it with him. But it was too dark to play with it so he laid it on the stump. The sounds of monkeys and animals in the trees started to make him afraid so he suddenly bolted back to the hut. He must have left it there.

He was going to have to go find it. Paul peeked out the door and the village area seemed quiet. So cautiously, he left the hut and walked down the hill toward the log. But he stopped when he got close. There was a small boy, about his size and age, sitting on the log looking at something. As Paul approached carefully, the boy looked up. In his hands was the Rubik's cube. The Ghana youth looked at it in his hands where he was playing with it and then at Paul. Then the biggest smile you ever saw came over his face and he held it out to Paul to return it to him. That smile was so warm, so happy and fun loving, it seemed to almost say to Paul, "come play with me".

Paul walked up slowly gazing at that friendly smile. The boy lifted the other hand and began to twist the Rubik's cube skillfully but looking at Paul for approval. Paul watched the patterns the boy was making. "No not that way, this way" he felt himself saying in his mind and before he knew it, he had sat down. Before long, the two boys were engrossed in the toy. Paul could not resist helping the boy because it was clear this strange colored, funny smelling boy loved the Rubik's cube just as much as Paul did and that made him just like Paul, not a foreign person at all.

The boys played for hours and what Paul thought was a time for him to teach this simple villager the hard logic of the Rubik's cube suddenly changed when boy suddenly laughed with joy and solved it. He chattered excited phrases to Paul in his own language and Paul took it from him and held it up and then burst into happy laughter. "YOU SOLVED IT!" he shouted with amazement and a thrilled joy. "I never saw anyone solve it! That's amazing!" Paul said with excitement. He patted the boy on the back showing his sincere respect for what he had done. "Hey let's see if you can do it again." Paul said and then he mixed it all up again.

Right away, the boy set to work, his tongue sticking out from his teeth just like Paul's did when he was close to solving it. Paul watched tense as an athlete cheering in his heart for his new friend to finish the puzzle. He didn't see the lead missionary come up.

"You boy's having fun?" He said in his always friendly voice.

"Yes. Reverend Keith. It's amazing. He solved it! He solved the Rubik's cube. This is so cool. I never had a friend who could..." Paul's excited bragging was broken but a shriek of laughter from this Ghanan friend. "HE SOLVED IT AGAIN!" Paul declared with excitement and he literally jumped up and started patting the boy and telling him how amazing he was. Reverend Keith was deeply pleased to see the boys from two very different cultures find fun together. He talked to the boy whose name was Ramda and told Paul his name and helped the boys talk to each other for about an hour before he had to get back to work.

Ramda explained that he too had to go help his dad work on their hut but both boys promised to meet tomorrow and play some more. As Paul and Reverend Keith walked back to the missionary huts, Paul asked. "What did Ramda say to you as he was leaving?"

"Well Paul." The missionary said. "He told me to thank you for playing with him and he made an observation about the Rubik's cube."

"Oh what did he say?" Paul asked with excitement. "He is so good at it. I want to know his secrets."

"He said it isn't as hard as it looks." Reverend Keith responded. "And you know Paul, the same is true of sharing your faith. By just being a friend, as you are being with Ramda, even if you are enjoying it and it seems natural, you are sharing your faith. All

you have to do is not hide what you know about Jesus and let God guide you in acts of kindness, compassion and your natural desire to see Ramda be in heaven like you will.”

“Well I want that for sure. Thanks Reverend. I will let God show me how to share Jesus with Ramda. I want him in heaven partly because I want him to be happy and not go to, well, the bad place.” Paul answered.

“What is the other part?” The missionary asked.

“Well, so I will have him there to play with me.” Paul laughed.

17

A Raven Named Marvin

Value: Respect Authority

“Hannah, come outside.” Hannah’s best friend Betty called up to her. Hannah slipped downstairs.

“What is it? It’s the middle of the night.” Hannah said shivering a bit from the cool night air..

“Its Lorenzo, he’s run away, we have to help them find him!” Betty said with deep concern and worry in her voice. Lorenzo was a neighbor of Betty’s who lived several houses down. Many times when Hannah was over, they found Lorenzo wandering the streets or in some strange place, just not being home. He told them things were not good there because his new step dad was mean to him but the girls didn’t know what to do.

“How do you know he ran away?” Hannah whispered.

“Officer Duncan and Youth Director Cindy came over and told my dad. Dad works at the youth center and they have been trying to help Lorenzo.” She told her friend. It was true that Lorenzo had come to Officer Duncan several times. The kind policeman wanted to help more but Lorenzo would not trust him completely. Youth Director Cindy had even tried to come over and visit Lorenzo at home but when she got there, usually Lorenzo was mysteriously “not here.” So all of the people who could help him most were frustrated because Lorenzo seemed to avoid them.

“I know where he is.” Hannah suddenly said snapping her fingers. “Sabines woods! He said he goes there sometimes because other people are afraid of it.” Hannah remembered as Betty nodded knowing she was right. “Let me get some clothes on and we can go look for him.”

The girls entered the woods fearfully. It was so dark and their little flashlights didn’t help much. “Lorenzo,” they tried to call out while whispering at the same time for fear

they would wake up something nasty in the woods. “Lorenzo, its Hannah and Betty, come on, come home with us.” They huddled together and whispered.

“I can take you to him.” A voice said firmly and the girls yelped with surprise. They looked around and didn’t see anyone. “Up here sillies, on the branch.” And they looked up and there was a very large black bird looking at them and talking.

“Did you talk?” Betty asked fearfully. “I never heard a crow talk before.”

“Yes I did but don’t be afraid. I am here to help you. You are looking for Lorenzo I think. I know where he is.” The bird said.

“Oh please help us Mr. Crow, we are sorry we were afraid of you.” The girls said together.

“I will do it but first of all, I am a raven, not a crow. My name is Marvin the Raven. Come along then, I think he is with Grimley the groundhog. They were going to make tea. Marvin flew ahead but low and slowly so the girls could follow. Somehow a light came up the further into the woods they went so they could see without their flashlights.

“Hannah, Betty, what are you doing here?” They suddenly heard the happy sound of Lorenzo’s voice. He came running from a clearing that was just teeming with animals, many of them walking around on their hind legs, drinking tea and talking in a most sociable manner. Lorenzo ran to the girls and hugged them.

“Lorenzo, how long have you known about all this?” Hannah asked hugging him back.

“Lots of kids come here.” He said with a big grin. “Lots of kids whose parents don’t love them come here because its safer here than at home. Let me introduce you to my friends.”

The next hour was amazing. They met Leonard the Llama who could quote Shakespeare flawlessly which is rare in a Llama. They met Grimley the Groundhog and his huge family of little baby groundhogs who loved to be petted. Grimley ideed make very good tea. They met Morris the Unicorn who really liked Betty and let her ride him.

“I didn’t know there were real unicorns much less in our woods.” Hannah said with amazement watching Betty hug Morris’s neck as she rode.

“Well they keep pretty quiet and they like to be with other they feel safe around,” Lorenzo observed.

“Everybody wants that.” Hannah heard herself say under her breath. After the ride. Lorenzo introduced them to a huge black bear.

“Hannah and Betty, meet Rocco.” He said pointing up. The bear was easily twelve feet tall, much bigger than any bear the girls had ever seen.

“Pleased to meet you girls.” The bear said and then he bowed. Betty was a little afraid of him.

“Don’t be afraid of Rocco, Betty.” Marvin the Raven said landing on the big bears shoulders. Yes, he is very dangerous and anyone who would harm these woods would meet with a very bad mauling from Rocco. But you are friends of Lorenzo so you will always be safe with Rocco and with all of us here. Now Lorenzo, Rocco and I have a special mission to take you to meet the King and Queen of the Forest.”

So Marvin the Raven lead Rocco, Hanna, Betty on a treacherous mission to the far side of the forest, where even the most magical and courageous forest animals went. Their destination, to meet the King and Queen of the forest was by invitation only. Along the way, they crossed over streams of shimmering flowing gold only to find nearby terrible dangers from falling poison pods and screaming monkeys who seem bent on stopping or destroying the party. But one mighty roar from the mighty Rocco sent the monkey running and screaming back to their lairs high in the trees.

Finally, they climbed a tall hill to a clearing before a portal that was surrounded with ivory pillars and majestic although sometimes spooky gargoyles. Marvin the Raven landed on the head of one such gargoyle and commanded all to kneel and bow so allow the King and Queen to enter.

“BEHOND THE KING AND QUEEN.” He said with majesty and they entered.

“Hello Lorenzo. Girls you did a good job of saving him.” Said the very familiar voice of the King of the Forest.

“Officer Duncan? You are the King of the Forest.” Lorenzo said with a gasp.

“Hello Hannah, Hello Betty, Hello Lorenzo.” A soft female voice soothed every creature there.

“Youth Director Cindy? How can this be?” Betty said rushing to her arms.

“Its true children.” Officer Duncan said lifting Lorenzo lovingly into his strong arms. “We have known of the magic of this forest for as long as it has been here. We work in your town to help children like Lorenzo but our roles in the magical world of Sabines woods is a secret kept in the heart of all of its citizens. Marvin the Raven, Rocco the bear and all the rest you met last night, they serve us by loving and caring for children who are running from adults who hurt them. But you can trust the authorities in your lives kids. The policemen, the teachers, the church ministers you know, they are as magical as we because they have been placed on this world by Jesus for the purpose of saving children that need help, just like Lorenzo here.”

“Now children, we will go to the youth center where your dad is Betty.” Queen Cindy said taking their hands. “But you must all hold what you have learned here dear to your heart. You are now part of this magical world and you must help bring children to us that we can help with their family problems. Do you swear your alliance to the secret of Sabines woods and its mission to help good children get the help they need?”

And Lorenzo, Betty and Hannah all swore so their membership in this magical society was made eternal. And now children, you too have become aware of the magical secret of Sabines woods. You must swear your allegiance to its secrets and to the calling God has on it, on you and on you parents, teachers, policemen, firemen, youth directors and all the rest to rescue children who are in trouble and bring Gods love and peace to a troubled world. If you agree to be citizens of Sabines woods, then raise your hand and your teacher will receive your pledge and the magic will be yours.

18

My Cat Thinks She is President

Value: Finding God’s Will for your Life

“Janey,” Gary whispered as mom and dad got ready to go out for their party. “Our cat thinks she is president.”

Both children giggled and promised mommy and daddy they would be good all evening. “How do you know?” she whispered as Daddy got their coats out of the closet.

“She told me.” He whispered back. “She can talk.”

Janey had quite a time not thinking about Fluffy their cat being able to talk but finally Gary and Janey’s parents were gone. “What do you mean she can talk? She never talked to me.” Janey said.

“Well, you have to ask her the right questions.” Gary said smugly. “I just asked her what she wanted to be and she told me that she wanted to be.....”

“President, that’s right.” Fluffy said walking slowly into the room. “No need to whisper, everybody knows I am going to be president. No, no, you had it all wrong Gary.” The little yellow cat with long soft fur said beginning to purr. “I don’t think I am president, NOW. But I will be, its my destiny.” She said with a bit of an accent. A feline accent no doubt.

“But Fluffy,” Janey said having trouble believing she was conversing with the house cat. “Why do you think you should be president? You are just a cat?”

“I know God made me for great things Janey.” Fluffy said licking her toes. “He made you for great things too, maybe not as great as me but great things.”

“Fluffy?” Gary said puzzled. “Do the other animals want to be president also?” he wanted to know.

“Well no,” Fluffy answered, “that would be just silly now wouldn’t it?”

“Not as silly as 12 pound cat who needs help getting down from trees wanting to be president.” Janey thought but she didn’t say it because she didn’t want to upset Fluffy.

“No, it’s different for different ones.” Fluffy continued. “Ralphie the dog thinks he is Alexander the Great. But I think he might be mistaken because I think Alexander the Great didn’t walk on all fours” Fluffy speculated.

“The gerbil thinks he is Abraham Lincoln. I am working with him on that one. And then there’s your two gold fish, Frank and Ernest? Well they think they are world war two flying aces. I wish you would talk to them about that Janey. They like you.” She continued seeing the amazement on the faces of the humans. “The duckling we got for Easter thinks he is Albert Einstein and you know that big fat squirrel that keep seating all the bird seed your parents put out?” Fluffy asked.

“Yes, who does he think he is?” Gary wondered.

“He thinks he is The Pope.” Fluffy informed Gary. “But he isn’t because I saw a picture of the pope on TV yesterday and the pope is definitely not a squirrel.” She concluded.

“Wow,” said Janey. “I had no idea animals thought so highly of themselves.” And she whistled.

“Well Janey,” Fluffy continued rolling on her back until she fell off the couch. “It’s possible some of us might be mistaken. But you know, you can feel inside that God has created you for something special can’t you?”

“I know what you mean.” said Gary. “Pastor Mathers talked about knowing God’s will for your life last Sunday and ever since then I have felt God has a calling for me but I don’t know what it is.”

“Me too Gary.” Janey said petting Fluffy which she liked a lot. “At the youth retreat, I almost felt like God was leading me to go on the missions trip but I don’t know for sure.”

“Well, I am only a house cat.” Fluffy said realistically “but us animals know that God has made each of us for a special purpose. Janey and Gary, you keep praying and you will find out what he has put you on earth to do. You know what Janey, when you pet me, I really get the sense you are going to do some big things for God.” Fluffy said and that made Janey smile.

“What about me Fluffy?” Gary said feeling slightly left out. “I think God might have big things for me too.”

“I know he does Gary.” Fluffy said jumping down and turning her tail to walk out in a huff as cats like to do. “But first maybe you should learn to clean up your room.”

19
The Happy Pony
Value: Joy

Princess was a very pretty pony. But none of her friends understood why she never competed for ribbons like all the other beautiful ponies. They all stayed in the common stables in town when they were not with their owners or training or racing or being shown for prizes.

“My master shows me in every pretty pony show in the kingdom,” Polly Pony said with great pride in her stable. She even kept her hair in braids and her ribbons on in the night when all the other ponies were ready for bed. That was how proud she was. “If your master was proud of you Princess, he would show you so all would know how pretty you are.”

“My master races me in all the races. When I win, he give me treats and promises me many more races.” Peter Pony said pawing the ground as though he was running that very minute.

“You have only belonged to your master for a month.” Polly said to Peter. “What happened to Prancer Pony, he belonged to your master before?”

“I think master sold Prancer because he stopped winning races.” Peter said sadly. “I liked Prancer, we were good friends. I think he had to go pull carts at the factory.” And Peter looked very sad.

“You know, my master used to care for me and my sisters.” Priscilla Pony said sadly. “But when Porsche and Petunia stopped winning....” She said and then a sad realization came over the stable.

“Don’t worry ponies.” Princess said in a joyful voice. “I am sure your masters love you and will keep you for all of your lives so you can play with master’s children and be part of their holidays and know the joy of being his family.”

“Wait,” Peter said with fear and despair in his pony voice. “It makes sense now. I always win so Master always give me treats but then I have to train for hours and hours each day. I never see master. I love him so much but I only see him on race days. He doesn’t even ride me, just one of his workers. Why won’t my master play with me and train me and ride me? It’s like I am property, not his prize pony.” And he cried. Instead of knowing the joy of the love of his master and the pride of his great wins, Peter Pony felt small and lonely for his master.

“Do you know all those things Princess?” Polly Pony asked.

“Yes Polly. My master cares for me and all his horses and animals with tender care. He would do anything for us. Why once last winter, he went out in that horrible snowstorm to save Sammy Sheep who had gotten lost and was freezing in the woods. The master himself could have died but he was ready to give his life to save even the least of his own.”

“My master didn’t even come to the stable during that storm.” Priscilla said with sadness and despair in her voice. “I wanted to be with him because I was so afraid. Are you ever afraid, Princess Pony?” She said wondering about how Princess had gotten such a wonderful master.

“Yes, I get afraid. We all do. But when I do, my master knows it and he comes to me and comforts me and I know that nothing in the universe can harm me as long as I am his.”

“Who is this wonderful master?” Peter said wishing he could serve such a one that cared so much for his ponies.

“His name is Jesus,” Princess announced happily. “And he wants all ponies to know his love. I was owned by an evil master such as yours before Jesus saved me from him. But now I am not only the servant of Jesus, I am his friend and he loves me as his very own. He bought me at a great price from my evil master.” She said remembering the day she met him with tears in her pony eyes.

“I wish he would buy me.” Polly Pony said her face almost to the ground with sadness and feeling almost like she was dead.

“Well I have good news.” Princess said. “My master has room in his home for all of us. He doesn’t want any ponies to suffer or not know the joy of a loving master. Why just today, he saved Prancer and took him slavery into the family of Jesus. And right now he is doing the same for Porsche and Petunia. If any of you will come to him, all of you can be bought by Jesus and be owned by a master who loves you.

And they all wanted that and Jesus was faithful to her promise for he had given all he had to save the ponies and they all became his and were treated as loved and loving friends and they had his family to love and play with and they were never thrown away for not being fast or pretty enough.

“Finally,” Polly said with a loud and happy whiney. “Finally we all know what Princess knew. We know the joy of knowing Jesus for our master.”

Three Hobbits

Value: Obedience

Billabong, Hooku and Dimptha were like all hobbits because their love of home, family and comfort was their greatest value. However, even as young hobbits, they were showing far too much willingness to go on adventures than their nanny, Edna approved of. Ever since their parents were taken by the dragon because they strayed too far from their hobbit home, Edna was very careful to keep the boys close to her skirts. And home where Edna was suited the boys fine because there the finest candies, cooked meats, cheeses and cookies always were abundant.

But then the unthinkable happened. Edna fell under a spell and was near death. Billabong, Hooku and Dimptha were frantic with worry. With no other adults to help, they had no idea what to do. Finally, they went to the clearing in the woods to think about it and hope they could find an answer between each other.

“We have to find a cure for Edna. The idea of living without Edna is terrifying.” Dimptha said without hesitation.

“But how? I doubt if we could ever know how.” Hooku said his furry hobbit ears red with worry.

“There is a way. In this big magical universe, there’s a way.” Billabong said confidently although his heart was less sure as his mouth.

“Hobbits!” A dark foreboding voice boomed from the shadows, in the bushes that could not be seen because of the fire at night. “You have faced dangers before for the ones you love, you must face them again.” The voice said.

“Who’s there?” Dimptha said his voice quivering as much as his knees.

“Ebenezer, is it you?” Billabong suddenly burst with restrained joy in his face. If it was Ebenezer, the oldest friend of the hobbits and a wizard extraordinaire, he may have the magic to help them save Edna.

“It is I, good Billabong.” The voice said gently but all the hobbits could see was a shape, no face, no form, just a dark shape in the shadows.

“Why can’t we see you?” Hooku said distrustfully. “How can we know that its you if we don’t see your face.” The doubtful hobbit questioned the wizard.

“If you see me, your Edna will not be saved. Are you willing to give all to save her?” The wizard challenged.

All of the Hobbits said "Yes" as one voice although each were troubled by the mystery.

“Then follow me. I am truly a powerful wizard, but we must see the greatest of all the universe to save her.” The wizard commanded.

That sounded scary but they were willing to bow before the greatest of the universe to save Edna. It was hard to follow Ebenezer because he moved fast and his legs were lots longer than the hobbits legs. And he was always just a dark shape, nothing they could really see or touch, just a feeling out ahead of them really. “How do we know he is there?” Hooku said with despair but his despair only got worse when the forest closed around them and enclosed them like a deep cave.

“Follow my trail hobbits and keep your eyes on me.” Ebenezer commanded but it was impossible to see him so they had to follow their sense of his presence. They could tell his footprints because though he was hard to see, where he walked had a glow that lasted just long enough for them to step in his footsteps.

“Step in his steps” Billabong said frantically. “The only way to make it is to walk just like he walked.” And that’s what they did until suddenly Hooku went running off the path into the dark forest.

“It’s impossible. We can’t follow what we can’t see. We need to know what is there. I doubt there even is a great wizard and how can we know what is there and hee haw hee haw hee haw.” Came the eerie sound as Hooku turned into a braying donkey. Dimptha and Billabong stood staring out into the voice hearing their brother’s frantic brays and weeping for the dark magic that changed him.

“Fear not,” the voice of Ebenezer came to their ears.” His doubts made him into something small that complains. He will not perish. He will make his way back to the hobbit village and return to his shape. You cannot help him now. Run behind me, we must be fast now.”

And the hobbits doubled their pace. The fate of Hooku stuck in their memories, especially Dimptha who felt turning into a donkey must surely be terrifying.

“Hobbits, watch me only. We must cross the chasm of decision. Do not look down at the bridge but keep your eyes stayed on me and you will not fear. But run across the bridge. Do not walk. Let your love of Edna carry you.” Ebenezer cried out and almost immediately, they felt the rickety wooden bridge beneath their feet. They ran on its planks but up ahead they could see that many planks were broken or missing. They could easily miss one and fall into the gorge. They could hear the rush of water, feel the heat of fires and hear the sounds of tortured souls down there but they worked with all they had to not look down but stay their eyes on the wizards darkened back running ahead.

Suddenly there was an explosion and Dimptha looked down.

‘DIMPHTA NO!’ Billabong cried out but too late. Dimptha's face grew pale and his eyes wild with terror.

“IT’S NO GOOD. WE CAN’T MAKE IT. WE ARE TOO SMALL. THE DANGERS ARE TOO GREAT!” he cried loudly and then there was a loud SNAP and he was off the bridge. Next to him in the air was a bat flapping frantically and then it flew swiftly away crying out in Dimptha’s voice. “Run, flee, it’s the only way.” Dimptha had turned into a bat and used his tiny wings to run away in fear.

On the other side, Billabong wept.

“Do not weep good hobbit. For we have reached our destination. Dimptha will not perish. His fears will carry him home to cower with his brother. The mission to meet the great wizard cannot be accomplished by those who give in to doubt and fear. Come, He is here, the great wizard of all time. He is just over this hill.”

“Who is this great wizard?” Billabong said walking side by side to his dear friend Ebenezer who he could see clearly now.”

“He is the creator of the universe. The source of all power for good, none other than the son of God, Jesus himself and only He can heal your Edna. In fact, He already has.” And with that, they stepped over the hill and instead of a great throne room or a majestic courtyard, they were in Edna’s bedroom, back in their hobbit home. Jesus was standing next to her and took her hand. Then he said to Billabong.

“You’re faith has saved her little hobbit. You did not doubt and you did not surrender to fear but you kept your eyes on your salvation and because of that, she is saved.”. Edna suddenly sat up and smiled.

“But why here?” Asked Billabong confused.

“Because God is always with you,” Ebenezer answered. “You just need to know how to see him. Your ability to see beyond doubt and fear gives you the power to see him. He will never depart you again. Now look.” The wizard said pointing out the window at Billabongs brothers, safe and playing near the well. “Go and greet them and teach them what you know.” Ebenezer said hugging his friend. “They have a lot to learn.”

21

Belinda and Tempest

Value: An allegory about temptation

Belinda was a good girl. She tried to keep the right kinds of friends and together they tried to stay away from things they knew their parents and teachers would not approve of. Most of her friends were from the church so they listened closely to the sermons, the Sunday school lessons and other instructions they got at church to make sure they knew

what was right. Belinda also did as she was taught and read the bible and prayed even though she didn't always understand what she prayed and if she prayed with her eyes closed, sometimes she went to sleep.

One day daddy brought home a new pet. His name was Pete the Parakeet. For several days, everybody had fun talking to Pete but he didn't say much. But it was clear that Pete had come to the house to be Belinda's friend. So he lived in her room.

"Wake up Belinda." Pete suddenly said as she dozed off reading her Bible.

"Did you just talk to me?" she said to the little bird. She had a hard time believing that Pete the Parakeet would actually speak to her.

"Yes, it's my job to talk to you. I have been sent here to do this. I am called to be by your side to help when you have trouble like sleeping when you should be reading your Bible."

Well it was clear that God had sent Pete for a very special mission to help Belinda with her faith, in struggling against her weaknesses and to advise, comfort and teach her. That's a pretty good parakeet.

One day, Belinda met Tempest. Tempest wasn't like the other girls, she was new, exotic, kind of exciting. So Belinda wanted to know Tempest more because she felt that Tempest could teach her some of those grown up things that other people would tell her about because they always treated Belinda like a little kid.

Belinda started finding times to be with Tempest when nobody knew about it. She found her best times with Tempest were always when nobody knew she was around and the thing she was telling Belinda were secrets. Secrets are fun.

"You know most of the things your parents and the church say are bad aren't bad." Tempest told her.

"Really? Why would they lie to me?" Belinda objected. "I know they love me."

"They do love you but they think you have to be protected because they don't want you to have the fun things they have. God could let you have fun things like smoking and drinking and staying out all night but he knows the adults should keep things fun things all to themselves." Tempest lied to Belinda. Sadly, Belinda started to believe her. It was so easy to want to be like Tempest and to try to please her.

As Belinda was walking home from spending time with Tempest, she was thinking about trying a few things she liked to do. After all, it was a secret so nobody would know. Plus she would still be a good girl to her friends and family and at church. Her fun times with Tempest would just be a little secret between the two of them. Suddenly Pete the Parakeet landed on her shoulder.

“How did you get out of your cage?” Belinda objected.

“You would like to box up the voice that reminds you of your moral duties but it doesn’t work like that,” the little bird said to her sternly. Belinda didn’t like be lectured, particularly by a bird but she knew he was right. “Tempest is leading you astray from God.” Pete continued. “God knows what is going on so your little secret isn’t a secret and if you develop sin habits with her, they wont be a secret long from your parents and friends either.” He said insistently.

Belinda felt so much guilt and conviction in her spirit because of what Pete was telling her. But she was confused because she wanted it both ways. She wanted to be good and have the respect of God and her mom and dad and the church but the fun things Tempests offered were so hard to resist. Finally, she did start to give in and met with Tempest to try some things.

Tempest laid all of the exciting forbidden things on the table in front of her at Tempests house when nobody was around. There it all was, the cigarettes, the alcohol, the bad magazines and tapes, a connection to the internet already on some naughty sites. All she had to do is reach out and take it and nobody was there to stop her.

Suddenly she looked out the window and saw Pete the Parakeet in the tree out side the window and his eyes were fixed on her. She thought she could hear his voice in her head. But this time he wasn’t lecturing her or making her feel bad.

“None of that will satisfy you Belinda.” The voice said. “All of these things are Satan’s cheap substitute for the perfect joy and love that Jesus gives. Right now Jesus am inside you giving you the strength to get up and walk away from these sins. You can feel him can’t you?” The voice said.

“Yes, I can feel him.” Belinda said out loud.

“What?” Tempest responded. “Who are you talking to?”

“Don’t use your own strength to resist the sins Belinda.” The voice said to her. “Use God’s strength inside you and get up and walk away and go home and have a Bible study with your pet bird.” It helped her.

And that is what she did. She stood up and just turned and walked away. God’s strength inside her even helped her resist arguing with Tempest but instead she just put Tempest behind her and treated her like she didn’t even exists. Belinda had learned an important lesson about resisting the devil and his desire to make you sin. You can too. You are the believer, like Belinda. And you will get temptations, like the ones Tempest brought. But the Holy Spirit’s job is to “come along side and help” you resist temptation, just like Pete the parakeet did. If you look for your own Pete, you will hear his voice and he will help you feel God’s power to resists temptation in you too every day.

22

The Good Talker

Value: Spiritual Gifts

“Who needs him, he’s such a loser.” Roger responded to his friend Steven when the subject of Danny came up.

“That’s a pretty harsh thing to say about your brother.” Steven responded. Roger knew it was harsh. He thought back when he and Danny were kids. Danny, the older by a year and a half, was always the guy who could “fix anything”. Oh, how mom and dad bragged on Danny when he fixed the washing machine or the lawnmower or unclogged a drain in the kitchen. At first, Roger tried to learn to do what Danny did but it never worked out.

Finally, in high school, Roger found his gift and like his own dad, it was the gift of gab. He won competition after competition in speech, debate and other forms of speech giving. He seemed to have a natural ability to talk to people, give speeches or just get people to see things his way or rally to his cause. It served him well as he moved into a sales career whereas Danny built a very successful auto mechanics business around his skill.

But sadly, for all the success the brothers had their dislike of each other kept them apart. Danny never understood by talking was a good skill and Roger thought being able to tinker with machines or pipes or wires was a geeky way to be. They fought about it endlessly until Danny moved out but holidays were always tense except when they went to see Grandma. Everything stopped at Grandma’s house because she saw them as her sweet baby boys and for a while when they visited her, they were sweet and children again, innocent and always ready to play.

Steven left his friend Roger in his office thinking about his brother. Roger wondered if there ever be a way to make things ok between them. He didn’t know that over I his garage, while fixing a car, Danny was wondering the same thing. Roger’s thoughts were broken by the phone ringing. He answered it. The sound of urgency in the voice was frightening.

“Roger, the floods have his Pilger.” Steven informed him. Pilger was not far from the large city where his family grew up. “The water is rising there and people are becoming trapped in their second floors. The Red Cross is going in to try to get people out.”

At first, Roger didn’t get too alarmed but then he remembered, Pilger was where Grandma lived. He picked up the phones and called her but no answer. He knew she lived alone in that big house and probably could not get to the phone. The thought of her alone facing that terror was more than he could stand. Moving almost on instinct, Roger got moving. He organized a rescue mission for the town of Pilger using his huge network

of contacts at church, work, his clubs and his business contacts. Within hours, Roger had an army of men and machinery gathered in the parking lot of the Church. They were ready to invade Pilger and save those people.

“Folks,” he announced to the crowd of rescuers from his bullhorn. “We need to pray. My grandma is down there and you all have relatives there too. Let’s pray that God help them until we can get there.” And then he bowed his head and led them in prayer.

“Roger we have another area to pray about.” Steve shouted out. “Lots of these boats are broken. We need mechanical help or getting all of us down there will be no good. We need someone who can fix anything.” Roger felt his face go hot with emotion because it was like God was telling him, “Get Danny.” He had no time to wallow in self-pity or resentment at Danny. He picked up his cell phone and called his brother’s number.

All he had to say to Danny was “Danny, its Roger, grandma’s in danger. Get down here.” And he knew Danny would fly to the scene. And that is what happened. Danny brought his tools and workers and in no time, they had the machines in tiptop shape. Side by side, the brothers loaded the boats and together they got to Pilger and got every citizen out. As the brothers sat side by side on the boat heading to grandma’s house they both suddenly knew why they were so different. Danny knew that he could have never gotten such a huge response and organized the rescue so beautifully. And Roger knew that Danny’s gift for fixing things was crucial to their success.

As they got grandma into the boat, she hugged them both and kissed them and then she said what they both were thinking. “God has given each of you boys a wonderful spiritual gift. Working together you are a powerful tool for him.” They knew it was right because that is how God blesses the church. By giving everyone unique and wonderful gifts, we all can work together to do what God has for us to do. Separate we are incomplete but together we are powerful tools for God to use for good.

23

The Brand New Wizard

Value: Patience

Sammy was a very impatient little wizard. He had been studying under the great wizard Orzo for a year and still could only do the simple tricks. How often he went to the base of the mountain and saw Orzo go to the top where the lightning flashed about him as he called out the great spells that sent healing and miracles into the villages below.

Sammy knew there was one great spell that was so powerful; it would even defeat the great dragon Belial. But the most powerful spell he knew was just the word “Ippidi Bippidi” which he could use to make fire come from the end of a stick. And even that was hard to use because he kept burning up the stick, making the fire go into something wrong like his dog Ralph or it would shoot out the wrong end of the stick. Plus most of the time when Sammy use the spell “Ippidi Bippidi”, his pants fell down.

“If you want to do great magic and such,” the great wizard laughed seeing his performance, “you will need to learn to keep your pants up each time.”

Sometimes Orzo took him on adventures as long as he promised to just mind the food and not try to battle the great dragon before he was ready. And Sammy did as he was told because while he was impatient, he was obedient to his master. In the last great battle, Sammy was able to get close and see the horrible dragon spewing hate and fire and lies and death at the villages and at Orzo. Sammy crept closer and closer to learn as much as he could about how the great wizard defeated the evil one.

Suddenly Orzo threw his hands into the air with his staff between them and looked up into the sky above the dragon, the battle, the village and all else and said the most powerful magic word of the universe. The powerful spell created an eruption of power from Orzo’s staff that sent the evil dragon flying in terror from the battle. Sammy listened closely and learned the word but he dared not say it. He hid it in his heart until it was his time.

Peace came to the land for a year and Sammy grew better at his duties. “Look master,” he ran into the chambers with Ralph, his dog right behind him. “I have gotten better at the spell.” He said.

He held out his tiny stick which was his staff. Then squinting his eyes to concentrate he said the spell. “IPPIDI BIPPIDI” he said and he held his breath. Sure enough, a small pillar of fire shot from the proper end and did not hit the dog. But the stick was a little burnt at the end so it needed work. “See?” Sammy said thrusting out his chest proudly and his pride might have lifted him from the ground. But then his pants fell down.

“We have to get you better pants little wizard.” His master laughed but it was clear Orzo was pleased at the progress. “It takes great patience to become a great wizard but one day I will teach you the master spell, the word that is above all words and can even defeat the great dragon.” Orzo promised and Sammy didn’t have the courage to tell him he had learned the word but never breathed it.

Belial struck without warning and this time on the home village of Sammy and Orzo. Before they had a chance to counter attack, the great evil was up on the town spreading devastation and death. Sammy and Orzo bolted from their beds hearing his terrible roars and seeing his fiery breath exploding out in the village everywhere.

“SAMMY, FIND MY STAFF!” Orzo commanded frantically as he gathered his gear to take the battle to the dragon. Together they shot out the door and out into the town. As soon as they were into the courtyard, they stood at the feet of the great beast. Sammy knew this was bad because Orzo did his best war from the mountaintop, not down in the valley where the village was.

“HIDE SAMMY.” Orzo commanded. Sammy quickly found an overturned wagon to stay behind. The flames flew from Belial and from the mighty staff of Orzo as the fierce war between good and evil took place right in the midst of mankind. Suddenly, Sammy saw a baby waddling out from its home nearby. The mommy was crying out in terror as she watched her baby walking directly toward Belial.

Sammy moved without thinking. He dove and scooped up the baby and rolled with it back to the doorstep of the mommy. She cried loudly and snatched his baby and pulled her inside. Just then, Belial roared and fire shot out toward Sammy. Sammy rolled out of the way just in time. But when he turned over, he saw something that terrified him. Orzo had turned to watch Sammy save the baby and that distracted was all the enemy needed. Just as Orzo raised his staff to utter the word that is above all words, Belial’s claw slapped him to the ground. Orzo rolled over and over and came to rest injured and moaning.

Sammy discovered courage inside him that he never knew was there. He reached down and grabbed the staff of his master and stepped into the clearing directly in front of the demonic dragon. Just then, Orzo woke up but could not move for his injuries. “SAMMY NO!” he cried out. But Sammy somehow found the strength inside him. He lifted the staff into the air in one hand.

“IPPIDI BIPPIDI!” He spoke the only spell he had practiced. A tiny flame shot from the staff and barely burnt the dragon’s toe. Instead of hurting him, that only made Belial angry. It rose up on its hind legs and roared in fierce fury rising high to bring his feet down to destroy the village once and for all. Sammy decided he had to use the secret word he had learned, the word above every word. There was no time to learn it or wait for Orzo to teach him. He lifted his staff up high over his head and grasped it in both hands and then he shouted the words....

“IN THE NAME OF JESUS!” He spoke and the authority in his voice shattered the air and brought trembling to Sammy, the villagers and even to Orzo. Suddenly there was silence. Belial froze in mid attack, unable to move. And then, as though he had been exploded from the inside, his form just turned to mist and disappeared. The great evil was defeated.

“Am I in trouble for knowing the words?” Sammy asked his master as he helped him back to their home.

“No, they are all words that all who serve our Lord should know. For He is the greatest wizard, not I and not you. And those words, well, that is the name that no evil can stand against.” His master said reverently. “Because at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, both on earth and under the earth and in heaven.” He said giving his apprentice a loving squeeze. “But you know what the best part is?” Orzo said

“What master?” Sammy asked as Ralph barked and ran ahead into their home.

“Well you finally learned to cast your great spells,” Orzo said with a laugh, “without your pants falling down.”

24
Misty Mountain
Value: Serving

Misty Mountain was the most perfect place there could be for two young bears to grow up together. Benji and Bambi were the happiest bear cubs on the mountain when they were tiny. All the forest creatures knew when it was playtime because they ran through the forest, stumbling over everything, chasing anything and never catching anything except each other. The fun they shared was contagious. All of Misty Mountain was at play when the bear cubs were at play.

As they grew up, Benji and Bambi were always close but Benji became an expert hunter and fighter. He many times fought enemies for the borders of Misty Mountain and was a hero to his friends and family. But just as many times, he created wars and fights that didn't have to happen and made trouble for the people creatures that shared the mountain with he and his sister. Every day was an adventure for Benji but he didn't always have the wisdom of when to enter into struggles and when to let God guide him.

Bambi the Bear and her sweet cubs loved playing near the lake at the base of Misty Mountain. When they played, they brought great joy to all living things just as she and her brother had done when they were young. Not far away she knew that Benji was hunting because that is what he always did.

Suddenly the alarm went up. Through the trees in every species language, the alarm was the same “DANGER – WOLVES”. The Asante band of roving wolves were back to Misty Mountain to raid and kill and destroy. All around the lake peaceful animals were pulling back and fleeing up the mountain to escape the raid. Already Bambi could hear their growls as they charged through the trees angrily. She gathered the cubs and hurried up the hill to their caves where she knew they would be safe.

Benji heard the wolves as well but his instincts acted differently. Instead of retreating to the hills, he took position to defend his beloved mountain and his family and friends. Somewhere in his mind a voice said, don't fight them alone Benji. Think before you attack. And that voice sounded like his sister, Bambi. He watched carefully from a sheltered place as the wolves gathered in a clearing to mass before they attacked. Before they could organize, he was on them.

The battle was fierce and for a while, Benji was winning. Wolf after wolf leaped upon him only to get batted away with claw marks on his head or chest for his trouble. Benji bit and growled and clawed and dozens of wolves were wounded. But the battle wore on him and suddenly he realized he was injured and starting to fail. His growls turned to howls of pain and tiredness. Without warning, he was hit from behind by a very large

wolf and he fell. Turning he looked up knowing that on his back, he was sure to loose when he saw something he never expected.

Behind the faces of the angry demonic wolves stood a bear a large and ferocious as any he had ever seen. She erupted with a growl that shook the trees and could be heard to the very top of Misty Mountain. Bambi tore into the wolves swatting them away from her brother and sending them flying into trees, over bushes and even into the lake. Their fierce growls and howling became frightened yipes. Instead of massing to attack, they fled in chaos into the woods limping and sprinting to get as far away from Bambi as possible. The Asante wolves never returned to Misty Mountain again.

Back in the caves, the cubs played on their injured uncle and imitated their brave mom in how she defeated the wolves. "I never thought you would fight like that." Benji said to his sister.

"It is good to fight for what is right and good. And anyone who loves their family will fight to protect them. I seek peace with all creatures, as our God created us to do but this is a world with evil in it and brother, when evil tries to take over good, it will have a fight from this timid mommy bear."

"Timid mommy bear" the cubs laughed and mimicked her swatting and making mock wolf cries. Benji laughed at their cute play and thought of the valuable lessons he learned. The were lessons about fighting and about defending what you cherish but they were also lessons of peace and joy that had always been the life testimony of his sister. And that day Benji's heart changed from the love of battle to the love of family, God and peace.

25
Chucky the Ducky
Value: Kindness

All the pretty ducklings were so excited about the big beauty pageant that was going to be held down by the lake. Oh, how they preened their feathers and tried on different flowers and new ways to waddle that they thought would give them the edge to win the contest. They quacked nonstop each evening before the competition about which one was the prettiest duckling of them all and often times they fought and got their feelings hurt and had to go pout because each thought he was the prettiest and each one worried that he or she wasn't.

It seemed like every duck in the colony could only think of the pageant and getting ready. Every duck except for Chucky. Chucky didn't care about being beautiful or being admired. His favorite thing to do was have friends over and getting to know them and sharing Jesus with them. The other ducks just didn't understand Chucky at all. He associated with the most unacceptable types. Chucky enjoyed having the frogs, the turtles, even the field mice to his home. To the other dignified ducks, it was out of the

question to associate with such unworthy beasts who were clearly not as advanced and sophisticated much less as pretty as the ducks.

“Chucky, why don’t you pretty yourself up? I bet with some preening and some pretty flowers, you could be able to compete in the beauty pageant on Saturday.” His friend Gracie Gander said to him.

“That’s not important Gracie.” He answered her. But Friday night I am having a small dinner party. Why don’t you come? Roger Rodent will be here with his family as well as Terry Turtle and his girlfriend Teresa. We are going to play twister. It will be fun.”

“Oh Chucky, there is no way I could socialize with THOSE species.” Gracie said proudly and she strutted out of Chucky’s home proudly.

The day of the pageant was so exciting. Ducks scurried about in nervous excitement about the chance to win the big prize, although there really was no prize. Finally the time came. Chucky and his guests watched from a distant hill as they sipped their tea and ate their cookies. The Ducks mixed and mingled in a group waiting for the pageant to start, sometimes pushing and biting each other in frustration and jealousy.

“FLY!” came the sudden command. Suddenly, catastrophe struck. From the tall grass, the human hunters stood up and began to shoot their guns. The duck colony was caught totally by surprise. An alert duckling spotted the hunters just before they struck and sounded the alarm. Instinct set in and the colony lifted into the air flying every direction so as not be good targets and flew in a panic away from the lake. The rifles rang their shots out in a riot of explosions that sounded like the world was ending. But no duck was killed. The hunters were mad and took their equipment and moved on to another site to shoot ducks.

Chucky excused himself from his guests who understood his concern. Quickly he waddled to the standard retreat spot where his fellow ducks would gather after such an attack. He got there before most of the frightened colony but when he did, he found something very upsetting. Gracie was hurt badly. Chucky went to her and comforted her. “Why me Chucky?” She cried and he plucked his own feathers to pad the places where she was hurt for warmth. Soon the whole colony arrived and they were all worried and upset but they would not come near Gracie.

“Come help me.” Chucky pleaded with them. “She is hurt. She needs all of our help.”

“Oh no.” the other ducks said proudly. “We could never soil ourselves with her now. What if some of the dirt and blood got on our feathers? No, no, Chucky. Just leave her. We cannot afford to be soiled like that.” And slowly the colony slipped away. But Chucky didn’t care about being dirty or getting her blood on him. He just knew he had to save his dear friend.

“I have to get her to my house where I can help her heal.” She quacked to himself.

“We will help.” Came the squeaky voice from the edge of the clearing. There stood his many friends that the other ducks would not associate with. The frogs, the turtles, the field mice, the rodents, the snakes all showed up. Chucky was always there for them, now they were here for him. They gathered around Gracie and helped transport her to Chucky’s home where she began to heal.

“Chucky, I feel so ashamed I was bad to your friends.” Gracie said a few days later as she was getting better. “Why do you think they helped you save me?” She wondered.

“Because that is what Jesus would do.” Chucky responded bringing her some more soup. “We are made in God’s image and God sent his son to save us and nothing would stop him from doing that. So the least we can do is reach out to friend to show her the same love.” he said. Gracie was so grateful and wanted to learn more about Jesus and Chucky’s good friends. Never again did she worry about being beautiful or proud as she was before the pageant. Now she just wanted to be more like Jesus, just like you and I want to be.

26

The Angel Child

Value: Angels

“GLORY TO GOD, GLORY TO GOD, GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST” The angel choir sang in the skies above Bethlehem that very first Christmas night. All of the Shepherds looked on in wonder as they heard from the choir of angels that filled the night sky of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ Child, Jesus who would save his people from their sins.

David watched from the hill not far from the flock and his uncle and dad who were tending the sheep. He had been coming out with his male relatives to learn how to be a shepherd under their care and teaching. They had sent him off to find a lost baby sheep that had wandered off. David knew exactly where the little scoundrel sheep was because he had chased her many times. He had given the sheep a name, Spunky and it had become David’s special pet in all the herd.

As the Angel Choir finished, David heard Spunky baa not far from where he was sitting. Spunky liked a little cove where some sweet herbs grew and only she knew about them. But she must have gotten caught in the brambles. Sure enough, there she was, all caught up and very unhappy.

“Oh Spunky, you get in trouble every time you come up here. What would you do without me?” David said happily, as he helped her get loose and she began to play about his legs and feet.

“Wow, is that a sheep?” David heard the small voice not far off.

“Who’s there?” He said nervously. As he looked around, a child, seemingly a few years younger than him stepped from the shadows. She was dressed all in white. But what really stood out is that she had wings on her back and a ring glowing on her brow, not like a headband, slightly above her brow and her whole gown glowed in the dark. “Who are you?” David said but he found he was not afraid so he approached her.

“Shhhh, I slipped out of the choir. I wanted to see what it was like, you know, here.” She said and she ran to Spunky and started petting her.

“The choir? You mean, in the sky?” David gasped.

“Yes, wasn’t that pretty? I sang a while but I can’t really do much so I slipped out.” She said her angels wings spreading as she played with the lamb.

“Hello, my name is David.” David politely introduced himself. “You’re an angel?” He said and he knelt down and looked at her face.

“Yes, my name is Shauna. You’re a human?” She said and for a moment, they just stared because neither had ever been this close to someone like that. Suddenly David jumped up and laughed.

“Then let’s play!” He declared running to a tree and jumping to the branch for a catapult.

“YAY!” Shauna giggled with delight and before she knew it, her wings carried her to the tree limb and she looked down and teased her new friend from her perch.

“No fair!” he declared but no time to fuss. The new friends, an angel girl and a shepherd boy ran and laughed and played for what seemed like hours in the hills just outside of Bethlehem, not very far from where the Baby Jesus was just born.

David ran ahead followed closely by Spunky and then Shauna who took flight from time to time and then landed running as fast as she could keep up when David splashed into a cold running stream laughing and slinging water back at the lamb and the angel. “Tag” David teased Shauna, “You’re it.”

Shauna was laughing and ducking enjoying every second because so much of this she never experienced in Heaven. Suddenly a sound like a trumpet was heard in the sky not far from where the Angel Choir sang its heavenly songs.

“David, I have to go home now. We all have to back to Heaven now.” Shauna said sadly.

“But I don’t want you to go. You are my friend, can I go with you?” David begged.

“No David. I am an Angel. My job will be to do God’s Will in heaven. I will praise him and help people when He sends me to help them.” She said lifting slightly into the air on her small wings.

“But I like those jobs. Maybe I can be an angel.” David objected.

“You have an even more important job David.” The Angel Child told him. Down in Bethlehem the Christ Child has been born. You must take the news of His salvation to everyone. Go to the valley and see Him David. His name is Jesus and only you, a human boy can tell other human boys and girls about Jesus. So go. I will always be near you because now that we have met, I will be your guardian angel.” And then she mysteriously disappeared.

“How will I know you are near by?” He shouted at the sky.

Just then, a big splash of water flew up from the stream and hit him in the face. He heard her voice near the stream. “Tag.” She said with a giggle. “You’re it.” She said. David laughed and turned and started to run to Bethlehem to see the miracle of the Christ Child, the Miracle of Christmas.

27

Abe and Zack

Value: The Story of Abraham and Israel

Note: The following is a modern rendition of when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Keep that in mind as you read it because it will seem somewhat odd to your listeners and you should be prepared to explain it to them if they get confused during the telling. JM

Abe and his only son Zack loved to camp and fish and hunt. They usually set aside a couple fall or early winter days for the outing. This time, they were out just a week before Thanksgiving. Usually when they hunted, they didn’t care if they shot a bird or just took pictures of one. But they brought guns because there were bears and large cats in this area of the country.

The first night, Zack hit his sleeping bag early and Abe was enjoying a quite fire in the cool of the evening when he felt God speaking to him.

“God?” Abe said to the inner voice that was guiding him with very specific instructions. “I am listening.” He whispered.

“Take Zack to the top of the mountain tomorrow.” He felt the spirit was saying. “There you will use your gun you will offer him to me to be the special kill that will be used to honor the Lord your God this Thanksgiving Day.”

What an odd instruction. How could God ask him to kill his own son, a son that God gave him after many prayers and one that God had promised to make into a mighty servant of the kingdom of God? Should he argue with God? No. Somehow, despite a very confused mind, he knew that obedience was the right thing to do.

In the morning, they broke camp and Abe told Zack about his prayer time. “God wants us to go to the top of the mountain where we will kill a very special prize to be used for our Thanksgiving meal this year.” Said Abe.

“God said that Dad?” Zack said skeptically. But Zack trusted God and trusted his dad with everything so finally he said. “Ok, if that what God wants, that is what we will do.”

They hiked along quietly with Zack in the lead. As Abe cradled his gun, he knew it would be so hard to turn his gun on his son who he loved more than even his own life. Finally, they got to the top of the mountain and Zack crossed the clearing. “Ok Pop, did God have any specifics about where this special prize was or what it would be? Is it a turkey or a boar or something else? You know mom doesn’t like surprises.” Then Zack turned back toward his dad and froze. There directly opposite was Abe holding his rifle to his face and pointing it directly at him.

Still Zack did not believe that his dad was going to kill him. His mind raced. Abe loved him more than any human in the world and Zack knew that God loved him too and had a wonderful future for him. So why was his dad pointing that gun at him? “Uh dad? Is the kill behind me because you know, I don’t mind ducking.”

“God will provide the kill.” Abe said solemnly and he brought back the hammer of the gun. Zack’s head was directly in his sights. As he began to squeeze the trigger, a powerful anointing from inside his heart surged up from his spirit.

“To the left!” the Holy Spirit said and without a moment’s hesitation, Abe turned the gun to the left and fired. The recoil of the gun knocked the old man down. He was afraid to get up but he knew God was in control. When he sat up, there stood Zack with a huge turkey in his arms killed with one precision shot from Abe’s rifle.

“That was some shot dad. I didn’t even see you aim. For a minute I thought that gun was pointed at me and I was all, you know dad, I can clean my room better, no need to get so dramatic but then you fired and....” Zack’s happy voice continued on but Abe just bowed his head and thanked God for honoring his obedience. Zack did go on to a great career, a ministry that brought salvation to many. In their old age, Abe finally told his wife about the hunting trip. Before she could get upset he told her the lesson he had finally come to from that amazing outing.

“God honored my obedience and the obedience of Zack. Since then I have walked with God as a friend. But friendship with God is always grounded in obedience.” He said.

Screwtape Again

Value: Satan and his Ploys

Screwtape felt pretty happy with himself. He was one of the top devils in Hades because he was so good at fooling Christians into committing sin. So when the assignment to disrupt one of the most Christian families on their hit list came from the top man of all the devils, well he felt very pleased. He immediately called his nephew devil, Wormwood to tackle the assignment.

“Wormwood.” Screwtape said looking at his pointy tail and red horns, the pride and joy of any good devil. “We have a big job to do. The Smiths are devoted followers of Jesus. The dad and mom make sure they are in church every Sunday. The little boy, Christopher sings in the youth choir and the older daughter, Stephanie is planning on doing missions work after high school. The top man of all devils has assigned us to ruin this family.” He said pacing back in forth in front of a blackboard like it were a military exercise. Screwtape never wrote on the blackboard but he thought it looked cool.

“The top man of all devils? Who is that?” Wormwood asked because he was a little slow sometimes.

“Satan, you goof!.” Screwtape finally told him clearly frustrated with his nephew. “Now you know what will work. Split them apart. Use anger, jealousy, hurtful remarks, rumors, irritations,. I will clue you as you go so get up there, they are getting ready to have family devotions. This is a good time to get in the way.”

“Yes sir!” Wormwood said saluting and hurting his hand on his own devil’s horns and off he took.

“Mom, are we about ready for devotions?” Christopher said to his mom walking into the kitchen. He was excited because tonight was his turn to pick the scripture to read.

Wormwood arrived just in time. He whispered in Christopher’s mom’s ear.

“Just slow down young man. You don’t set the pace around here, dad and I do. We will have devotions when we are good and ready.” The mom snapped at her son and as soon as she did, she was alarmed at what she said. She ran to Christopher and hugged him. “I’m sorry sweetie. I don’t know what got into me.”

“Excellent Wormwood.” Screwtape said to his nephew, “That is just what we want, pour it on now.”

Stephanie entered the living room where Christopher was reading his Bible, looking for a good passage. While she could not see or feel him, instantly Wormwood was at her side whispering in her ear.

“You think you are so cool with all your Bible reading.” She hissed at her brother who she loved so much. Stephanie couldn’t believe these words were even coming out of her mouth. “Well let me tell you something. All the kids at church think you are a phony and they hate you.”

“MOM” Christopher’s cries went up like a fire alarm. Dad came running from the back room. Zeke the dog started barking, the cats ran for cover and mom was trying to out shout the two children to find out what happened. Somewhere Screwtape was smiling and muttering, “Family devotions is looking pretty unlikely tonight.” Wormwood was on the move all over that house.

“You kids are driving me crazy.” Daddy shouted. “I would be ashamed to be seen in public with his bunch of animals.” Daddy immediately slapped his hand over his mouth. “Where did that come from?” He muttered.

“You have always been jealous of me!” Christopher screamed at his sister feeling like someone else had taken him over entirely. “It’s because I am the youngest and you want all of mom and dad’s attention.” He shouted and then he began to cry and he ran to his sister and hugged her. Even though she was furious, she hugged him because her love of family was stronger than whatever this is that is attacking them.

Suddenly, Christopher and Stephanie’s Daddy’s face changed and everyone knew that he knew something. “OK HOLD IT!” He shouted.

It was that voice of authority that nobody anywhere would dispute. Even Wormwood, in the spiritual realm and unseen by the family, froze in his tracks at the commanding authority of the spiritual head of this household. “Everybody, let’s sit down.” Daddy instructed. Mom was so glad to hear his tone because she felt that the Holy Spirit was using him to fix whatever was wrong.

“The enemy is attacking us to stop us from having our devotions. Let’s sing.” And he began to sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know...” Soon the whole family was singing.

“OW OW OW OW OW” Wormwood held his head and writhed in agony crying out for help. “Uncle Screwtape, I can’t endure the songs of praise to Jesus. Help me!!!”

“Abort, abort! Get yourself out of there.” Screwtape instructed his nephew and in seconds, Wormwood was gone. As the Smiths embraced, loved each other and Jesus and apologized for all that was said, Screwtape and Wormwood cowered in Hades.

“They did it again, Uncle Screwtape. They defeated us with the name of Jesus and by singing God’s praise.” Wormwood said sounding very unhappy.

“I know.” Said the crafty devil Screwtape. “But we will let them alone for a while and attack again. They will have to stay close to Jesus to avoid our attacks. Just wait, Wormwood, just wait.”

29

Charlie Won't Go

Value: Knowing God

Charlie, George and Cliff had been going fishing together since they were little boys. They all could remember walking along the dirt path to the small lake near the small town where they were raised, carrying their poles and tackle boxes to fish the day away. Most of the time, it wasn't about fishing at all but being together and becoming closer buddies. Some guys don't stay friends after they get older but Charlie, George and Cliff stayed good pals all the way into high school. When they could drive, they often borrowed one of their parent's cars and went fishing at a lake a little further away. They had a tradition that when they did that, each one would take a turn picking a lake to fish at and not tell the other two until they got there.

The car rumbled along the freeway with Cliff at the wheel. It was his turn to surprise his life long pals. "I will promise you this boys." He said as they pulled out of the driveway. "Today will be a truly unique fishing trip. Truly unique." And he laughed a very strange laugh when he said that.

They listened to old time songs on the radio as they rode along but Charlie and George soon felt lost because they didn't know where they were or where Cliff was taking them. "Hey Cliffy boy, you know where we are going?" Charlie teased him from the passenger seat poking George who was in the front seat with Cliff.

"Oh I know, trust me, I know very well where we are going and what we will find when we got there." Both of his pals just stared at Cliff when he said that because he said it in a very spooky way. Finally, Cliff turned the car off of the main road and started up a country road and then off of it on to a dirt road so his friends felt sure they must be close to this mysterious fishing spot. But then, just before they topped a very tall hill, Cliff pulled over to the side of the road, stopped the car and got out.

"Hey what's going on Cliff?" George said getting out with Charlie right behind him. "This can't be the place can it?"

"It's the place." Cliff said staring at the top of that big hill.

"But Cliff, I was looking at the map and there isn't a lake anywhere near here. What's going on?" Charlie asked puzzled.

"Well, first we are going to go over that hill. But we aren't taking the car, we are going to walk." Cliff said mysteriously.

"Should we take our rods and tackle?" George asked.

“Nope, won’t need them. Not for what we will meet over that hill.” Cliff said with a grin on his face.

“Ok, I have about had it with all the mystery Cliff.” Said Charlie angrily. “What are we going to meet on the other side of that hill?”

“God.” Was the one word answer.

“God?” both friends questioned.

“Yep, God.” Was the answer.

“Just over that hill. God is there. And what is He doing there?” George continued.

“Waiting for us. It’s our time. When we walk over that hill, we all meet God. Not in a Sunday school way. We will see him, hear him and meet him face to face. God. Just over that hill. Let’s go.” And Cliff turned to walk up to the top of the hill.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute.” Charlie touched Cliff’s shoulder to stop him from leading them to the other side. “What do you mean, ‘meet God’? Do you mean we are going to die on the other side of the hill?” he said with fear in his voice.

“Well, I don’t think so.” Answered Cliff. “One way to find out though is go over the hill and meet God. Ready?”

“No, no, no, no, no. This is crazy Cliff. People don’t just walk up to God and meet him?” George objected.

“Sometimes they do. Today we will. Come on, let’s go.” Said Cliff.

“Hold it, hold it, hold it.” Charlie complained. “Doesn’t this sound a little crazy to you? We don’t want to do anything crazy here.”

“I don’t know Charlie.” George said thoughtfully. “If God is really just over that hill, it would be crazy not to go meet him. Sure, Cliff, I’ll go, lets check it out.” And George and Cliff both started up the hill. “Coming Charlie?” George called back to his friend.

“Wait, please, wait.” Charlie said sweat bursting from his brow and tears forming in his eyes.

“What’s the problem pal?” George said as he and Cliff approached Charlie, worried about him.

“I can’t do it. I can’t meet God today!” the panic stricken Charlie said frantically. “I have, well, some sins. They are hidden. And they are bad. I can’t meet God.”

“But God knows about your sins already Charlie.” Cliff explained. “And he is ready to forgive you and offer you his friendship. It’s just over that hill Charlie, complete forgiveness because of what Jesus did for us on the cross and friendship with God. You want that don’t you, Charlie?”

“Yes, well, no, well, maybe. I don’t know. I am scared Cliff. I can’t. I am sweating. I feel faint. I might throw up. Please, don’t make me go George. Maybe next time. Yeah, that’s it. You guys go. Tell God I will come next time. When I get a chance to clean up my heart. Tell him for me. You will do that for me, won’t you Cliff? George?”

Charlie’s friends helped him find a seat on a fallen tree near there and gave him some water to help him calm down. “Ok Charlie. Sure, we will tell him. You just stay here with the car.” And at that, Cliff and George turned and walked up the hill. Charlie watched him feeling awful inside. So many questions raced through his mind. What if there isn’t another time? What if I die before I make myself right with God? He considered running after them but then they disappeared over the crest and they were gone. Charlie just put his face in his hands and wept. He didn’t have the courage to run to God’s arms and be saved and now it was too late. And all because Charlie wouldn’t go.

30

Nobody Asks the Donkey

Value: God’s Faithfulness

Sydney the Donkey and Muriel the sheep walked along the rough Egyptian road trying to keep up with the crowd. Everyone was all in a rush and upset and pushing and yelling ever since Moses finally got the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go and Moses had the Hebrew nation pack up everything and march toward to the Red Sea and to freedom.

“Well this was an unexpected trip.” Muriel said running a bit to keep away from the switch her master was using to keep the animals moving.

“What are you complaining about?” Sydney responded. “Look at all the junk I have on my back. They make me carry everything.”

“Well why don’t you just dump it on the road? You are a donkey, people expect you to be stubborn.” The helpful sheep advised.

“Well it’s not that bad. Besides that is what God created me to do and if it makes me useful, then I will have a place in the Promised Land.” Sydney said optimistically.

“What is that?” Muriel asked.

“That is where we are going silly.” The donkey informed his friend. “This isn’t just a vacation trip you know. God did all those amazing miracles back there to get us out of slavery and to take His people to the Promised Land, which they say, is like paradise. This is the trip to get there Muriel. Pretty exciting huh?” Sydney answered her.

“Oh oh, trouble.” Muriel remarked and she knew what she was talking about. Just ahead, the caravan came to the edge of the Red Sea and they were grinding to a halt. “This is terrible, Sydney” Muriel said in a panic. “Look at that river. You can’t even see the other side and it is churning and flowing. It must be a mile deep. Nobody can cross that. Look at Moses just staring at it. He didn’t have a plan for this. I knew it. This is just what the mistress of our family said all along. Moses should have left us in slavery. At least we wouldn’t be backed up to the sea ready to be slaughtered by Pharaoh’s army.” And then Muriel started to cry which is a pretty unpleasant thing to listen to a sheep do.

“Haven’t you been paying any attention all this time?” Sydney said nudging the weeping sheep so maybe she would stop crying. “Remember what God did to Pharaoh when he wouldn’t let us go? He sent plague after plague. The sun went out, the sea turned to blood, frogs and locusts covered the land. That was all God’s doing because he loves us so much, he couldn’t stand to see us in slavery.” The donkey said in his honking donkey voice.

“How do you know God will save us from this? This is hopeless. All of the humans are upset and panicking. If you are so smart, how come none of them know what you know?” Muriel said critically continuing to sniffle.

“Well, nobody asks a donkey what he thinks about things.” Sydney said sounding somewhat hurt that he was never consulted. “It is amazing to me the people of God continue to not trust Him. Look at all those miracles and through all of that, none of those horrible things happened to us. God kept the homes and land of His people from all the plagues. Even that last one where he killed the first born of every human and animal. God made sure our masters knew how to avoid that disaster. I am glad because my brother Melvin is the first born and I would have hated to see him go like that.”

Suddenly the panic in the crowd got much worse. The people were screaming, “Pharaoh’s army is right behind us. They are almost here!” The children running around crying and bumping in to things and being stepped on by the adults.

“Come here children” Sydney said to the panicking children. But all they heard was a “BRAY” from his donkey face. But they seemed to understand because they hid under his legs to keep from being trampled.

“Any room for a sheep under there?” Muriel said shyly. Sydney scooted the five year old into her brother’s lap and Muriel snuggled in and all the children hugged her warm fur.

“Sydney, I am afraid.” Muriel said softly so the children wouldn’t cry.

“Get ready, Muriel. I don’t know what God is going to do but he won’t let his people die like this. God is faithful. He sent Moses from far away to save us from slavery. Some day a great Messiah will come and take all of his people to paradise. I hope that includes slightly smelly donkeys and scared little sheep like you Muriel.” The donkey laughed.

“Well, that is someday. For now the army of Pharaoh will be here any minute and I hear Egyptians like lamb stew quite a lot.” She said and then she started to cry again. The children started to cry because she was crying and everybody was upset.

“You have to trust in the faithfulness of God you silly sheep.” The donkey scolded. “Look, see at what Moses is doing?”

Muriel peeked around Sydney’s legs and when she did, the children peeked too. Because they were on a ridge, they could see Moses standing in front of the raging Red Sea facing it with his chest out. Then, he lifted his staff and spoke some words they could not make out. All of a sudden, the sea began to crash and twist and change and a valley opened up and pulled apart to make a huge pathway that was completely dry. Moses signaled and God’s people started crossing it to safety, to salvation and to the Promised Land.

“I am sorry I was such a big baby, Sydney.” Muriel apologized letting the youngest children ride on her back as they entered the parted sea. “You are my friend and you were right all along about God’s faithfulness.” She apologized.

“Well,” Sydney said warmly. “Its ok, I am used to it. After all, nobody ever asks the donkey.”

31

If I Were God

Value: God’s Nature

April and her friends often met at the ice cream shop after school to talk and hang out and have fun. Their parents didn’t mind because the ice cream shop is near the elementary school and they could pick them up there. Today they were all excited about the discussion they had in history class when the teacher was talking about the presidents of the country. After they had their lecture and video the teacher had a game called “If I were president” where everybody said what they would change if they got a chance to be president.

“Well that was a fun game all right.” April said as she slid into the booth at the ice cream shop after school. “But if I were president, I would spend all my time on stopping wars.”

“Not me.” Ginger interrupted. “In fact, I would need more power than just a president has to get what I want. I would have to be God. Yeah, that’s a better game. What would

you do if you were God? I know what I would do. I would make sure there was never any more mosquitoes. Ewww I hate those things.” She laughed.

“Well if I were God, I would get rid of all the governments and have one government run by me.” Susanna said staring off into space. “And if anyone didn’t obey, I would just wipe out their country. That would put an end to all the wars and that stuff.”

Just then, April’s little brother Stevie walked in which meant their mom had dropped him off and would be back shortly to take April and Stevie home. Stevie was seven years old. He sat down and listened to the game.

“I think if I were God, since I would have the power to do anything at all, I would first stop all the sickness and old age and bad storms and earthquakes so people all over the world wouldn’t suffer so much.” Added Kimberly who always had a soft heart for suffering people.

“Well I don’t know. It seems to me that if everyone was a believer, we wouldn’t have so much trouble with sin so maybe if I were God, I would just force everyone to be a believer and then there would only be one world religion.” April said daydreaming about how that would be.

“Don’t you think God would do that if he could, April?” Ginger said.

“But God is all powerful, I wonder why he puts up with lost people and just doesn’t wipe them off the face of the earth in one wave of His hand and end all the sin and killing and awful sins people do.” April responded knowing she was unsure of what she was talking about and trying to remember if the answers to these questions had been covered in Sunday school.

“Well my uncle was lost until he received Christ last month. If God had wiped all the lost people before that, he would have gone to hell but now he is going to heaven so I am glad God didn’t do that and maybe that is why he is waiting.” Ginger said emotionally because she loved her uncle and all of her family.

“Well if God had forced your uncle to get saved before he wiped out the rest, then he wouldn’t have gone to Hell.” Susanna added.

“I am glad God didn’t force me to get saved. When I gave my heart to him, I wanted to. If he forced us, it might be like when mom and dad forces you to clean your room. You do it but you resent them for pushing you around. I don’t think God pushes people around.” Ginger said.

“Well he could if he wanted to.” April reminded everybody.

“You know what I think God would do if he was God?” Stevie suddenly interrupted and everybody laughed because of how he said that. “I think he wouldn’t be all bossy and

make anything change but I think he would come down from heaven and become a human so he can save the lost people because he created them to be his family and I know mommy and daddy would do anything to save us if April or I were lost. They would even give their lives to save ours.”

Everybody stopped talking and just stared at Stevie. He may not have even known it but he hit on exactly what God would do to save his children.

“Not only is that what God would do Stevie,” said Kimberly, “that’s what he did do.”

“What do you mean? I was just playing the game.” The little boy wondered.

“She means that is what God did, when he came down as Jesus. He gave up His throne and of His powers and all of His kingship to become a poor human baby. Then he grew up here and became a teacher to teach us about Heaven. And then he went through everything we go through so we know he understands it all. And then he let people kill him so we could be his family and then he rose again to take us to heaven.” Kimberly continued.

“Wow, I feel foolish for thinking He would do anything else. I should have known that.” Ginger said softly and humbly.

“Me too.” Susanna added looking down at her ice cream. “Stevie how did you know all that?”

“Well,” Stevie said not knowing he had said anything smart at all. “I do listen in church and Sunday school.”

“Well girls,” April laughed. “Sounds like we need to do less gossiping and flirting and giggling in Sunday school and do some listening.”

“Yeah April.” Susanna agreed. “Then maybe we won’t find ourselves being shown up by a seven year old about how God really thinks and feels about things.

April and Stevie’s mom came and they went home to think about the conversation but Stevie walked out feeling about seven foot tall because he learned something about God and it was right.

32

What Odd Creatures God Made

Value: Creation and the Fall

Ariel and Serena were angels. God gave them all kinds of interesting assignments which they loved doing because they were created by God for the sole purpose of doing his

bidding. But for as long as they could remember, they had never had such an interesting assignment as this one.

“Where are we going?” Serena complained to Ariel as she drug her out of her angel apartment right in the middle of her nap.

“Listen, we need to hurry. God is about to do something completely new. He is going to create a whole new universe and he is going to do it in just seven days. Not only that but word on the streets of gold and silver is that God is going to create a whole new being, not like angels or anything we have seen before.” Ariel said breathlessly trying to get her friend to hurry up. “God wants all available angels there to witness it and create songs of praise about what he is going to do.”

So Serena hurried and they got pretty good seats on the edge of the universe so they could see everything. “What’s wrong out there? The whole place looks like chaos.” Serena observed.

“It is but God is about to fix that. Watch”. Then as the two angels watched, the voice of God could be heard commanding “LET THERE BE LIGHT” and there was light. Then he created sky and the dry land of this new world that was named “earth”

“See now that’s where I would have done things differently.” Observed Serena. “I would have made the universe and the stars and suns and all that first and then make the earth last, in some sort of big bang or something like that.”

“Yeah, well good thing you aren’t God then, Serena” Ariel criticized. “Because that is a dumb idea.”

There wasn’t much time for discussion because God was moving fast. “Wow it’s like he had this all planned out” Ariel said with awe.

“Since the beginning of eternity, some say.” Serena observed.

“How can eternity have a beginning, its eternity?” Ariel nit picked.

“Stop you are going to hurt my head.” Serena responded.

God was moving fast. He created the planets and then the stars and moons and seasons. It was all falling into place one thing after another. “I think He is done.” Ariel speculated.

But God was far from done. He filled the oceans he just made with fish and whales and a huge variety of living things and then he turned around and did the same thing to the land, populating with a dizzying assortment of animals of every imaginable shape, size and color.

“Wow, God is so creative.” Serena said with a low whistle.

“Well, he is the creator silly. Do you think that thing with the long neck is the special creature he is going to make that we talked about?” wondered Ariel.

“No, that’s an ostridge you nut.” Serena corrected her fellow angel. “This new creature will rule this world. Ostridges can’t rule, they spend too much time with their heads in the sand. Oh look, I think the time has come, God is creating his masterpiece.”

The process of creating this new creature was completely different. God formed him from the dirt very carefully. He seemed to be pouring so much love into this new design. Finally, the shape was perfect and he named this new creature “man”. But it was still a dirt statue when God did something completely unexpected. He exhaled his own breath into the figure and it came to life.

“Wow, that means that man has God’s own life inside him. Not like the other animals or fish or plants. This “man” thing is a relative to God.” Ariel said reverently.

It was so much fun to watch Man and then the companion God made for him, Woman, enjoy the wonderful earth and the special garden God made for him. They seemed to be in paradise. But something went wrong.

“Look, the woman is talking to that snake.” Serena said with alarm. “Get away from him, Eve.” She tried to call out. “He is nothing but trouble.”

But it was too late. The evil one talked the woman and then the man into sinning and all of a sudden, all of God’s perfect creation started going to shambles. God took his beloved creations, Man and Woman and they were thrown from the garden. They started knowing disease and old age, and worry and decay and so did the wonderful creation God had made.

Serena was beyond consolation at what had happened. Ariel had a terrible time getting her to come out of her room she was so upset. “It’s ruined forever. This is so tragic.” Serena wept.

But then, suddenly, they heard the voice of God as he condemned the snake for his role in the Fall. “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

“Serena, did you hear that? Do you know what that means?” Ariel said with a barely held in excitement.

“No Ariel, it was pretty hard to understand.” Serena answered.

“God is promising to save mankind. He is giving them a promise that some day, God himself will come to earth and die for the sins of man. The son of God that we love so

much here in Heaven, he is going to go down and bring salvation to all lost men and to the fallen earth and universe too. And when it's all over, it will be better than it ever was in the first place because God's people will know better than to disobey and they will follow God willingly and be his family and that is what God has wanted all along."

"Well then," Serena concluded. "Let's get busy and help man all we can. When Jesus brings them salvation, the glory of God will be greater than it ever has been through all eternity. Come on, Ariel, we have work to do."

33

Love in a Bottle

Value: The Love of God

Brad and Janet had to do a science report on a current event in science going on in their community for their sixth grade science class. Then they saw in the paper that a scientist on the other end of town was almost ready to get a breakthrough on bottling an important thing that everyone needs. So they called up and got permission to come out and be there for the final tests.

When Brad and Janet arrived, the laboratory wasn't exactly what they expected. It was on the edge of town and the bus went a long way into the grounds and dropped them off to pick them up again in an hour or so.

"Brad, this looks like an old castle more than a laboratory of a scientist." Janet complained.

"For goodness sake, Janet, get a hold of yourself. It's ok. Lots of scientists use old buildings. It helps them save money. Ring the bell." So Janet but the huge black button but instead of a DING DONG, the sound of a gong rang through the entire building. It was getting dark so they were eager to be inside. The sound of footsteps came from inside and then the big wooden door that was more like a church door than a business creaked and moaned and opened. There in the doorway was a very strange man. He was small, about as small as Brad and Janet and they were children. He was bent over and his back seemed to pooch out in back like there was something wrong with it. He had stringy hair and he spoke badly, like he had a bad speech impediment.

"Are you Brad and Janet?" He said in a strange way that made them both get goose bumps.

"Yes," Janet said, "I am the girl member of the team." She said realizing how dumb that sounded.

"Please come in. Doctor Stein has been waiting for you. My name is Gregor, please feel welcome." The big door slammed shut like it would never open again and they followed Gregor up a long spiraling staircase to an upper room that looked like it opened to the

night sky where a storm was brewing. Another huge door opened and they came into a laboratory that was a full of whiling lights and colorful fluids boiling and percolating all over the place. Suddenly from behind a work station a wild haired silly looking man appeared. He was tall, lanky, his glasses were taped in the middle and his hair went everywhere.

“Brad, Janet, I am so glad you are here for this important night. I am Doctor Stein. Frank Stein but call me Doctor Stein. You met Igor.” The crazy man said talking fast with his hands and arms going everywhere as he talked.

“I thought his name was Gregor.” Brad objected.

“Gregor, Igor, what’s the difference?” Said the doctor. “What’s important is what I have here. Look in these bottles. In these bottles I have the final two formulas for bottling the most important need mankind has ever had. Yes, I have perfected the formula to bottle love. Think of it Brad. You too Janet. If I can bottle love, nobody will be unloved ever again. They can just drink my formula and, whammo, instant love.”

“But that doesn’t really make sense because.....” Janet started to say but she couldn’t interrupt.

“THIS IS PERFECT.” The doctor yelled throwing his arms all around him. “The formulas are at their perfect moment right now. We have to get an experiment done. Now, formula number one, its ready. Igor come here, drink this.” And he handed his bent over servant the vial with some of the fluid that was supposed to be love. Igor drank it, then he began to twitch and make weird noises.

“EEK, IKE, OOPS, YOWZA!” Igor said and then he fell to the ground. He didn’t exactly stand back up but got up on his hands and knees. “Arf.” He barked. “Arf arf” and he began panting and acting exactly like a dog.”

“Oh my.” Janet said quietly.

“You said a mouthful Janet.” Said Doctor Stein. “That’s all wrong. If you have love in a bottle, it shouldn’t turn you into a dog. We need more love in the world, not more dogs.” And he went to the counter and got a shot. “Here Igor, this is the antidote.” He gave Igor the shot. Igor rolled over to have his belly scratched then twitched.

“EEK, IKE, OOPS, YOWZA!” he said and then he stood up. “Master can’t we use mice or somebody else for these experiments? I am getting worn out turning into things.”

“You mean you have tried your love in a bottle on him before?” Brad said with outrage.

“Well yes.” The doctor confessed. “Those experiments didn’t exactly work out. The first time it changed him into a lemur. Let me see then there was the time he was a ferret, an entire band of circus acrobats and a stick.”

“Don’t forget an eggplant, a girl scout, John Wayne, the entire cheerleading squad for George Washington Carver Middle School and Elvis” Igor remembered painfully.

“Yes some of the formulas have not gone very well.” Doctor Frank Stein said sadly.
“But this time I think we got close. He was a dog and after all, everybody loves dogs.”

“You can’t get love inside you drinking a medicine.” Janet finally said firmly getting tired of all this foolishness.

“What do you mean?” The mad scientist asked.

“You can only get the love of God in you from Jesus?” She continued. “The Bible tells you all about it.” Janet said and she took out her Bible and showed Igor and Doctor Stein where Jesus taught his disciples that all of us have to accept Jesus as our savior and that then His love would fill our hearts to overflowing.

“You mean God just pours love into your heart and you don’t have to drink anything?” Doctor Stein asked.

“That’s right and you don’t have to buy anything or even be a good person because Jesus will come in and make you a good person from the inside out.” Brad added remembering all the good things Janet and he had learned in Sunday school.

“Well there goes the plan to get rich selling love in a bottle.” The doctor said sadly.

“But you can be full of His love right now. You too Igor. If you let us pray with you to accept Jesus.” Brad continued.

So the doctor and Igor accepted Jesus and their hearts were full of God’s love for the rest of their lives. God used their amazing talents for good things, to help poor people and cure diseases. And they never again made a formula that turned people in eggplants, ferrets or Elvis and none of their medicines made people go. “EEK, IKE, OOPS, YOWZA!”

34

Discovering Heaven

Value: Heaven

The scientists at Exedor Laboratories got the strangest assignment they ever saw one day in October. The company specialized in using scientific research to find out the big mysteries of the universe and they had done very well in the last few years. The project they received that day though was the strangest of them all and the customer who ordered the research was very mysterious.

Hector, the lead scientist read the assignment to his research team. All of the scientists put down their microscopes and their special glasses for examining things that need to be examined and buttoned up their white coats to listen.

“This assignment will be the most difficult of all we have done, gentleman.” Hector said in a slight German accent. “We are to research the existence of Heaven. We are to gather information from every source, every religion all around the world and prove scientifically that Heaven exists and then provide to our customers details of what it will be like and how to get there.”

Well, the staff was pretty confused by their assignment but they got right on it. Before long, they were fanning out into the libraries and around the world to find proof of the existence of Heaven. Georgiou found that the Heaven called Nirvana is not really a place at all but an afterlife where you stop existing and get absorbed into a “great nothingness.”

“That won’t do Georgiou. We would have to prove that this ‘Great Nothingness’ exists and how to get there. Besides that sounds more like a recipe for chicken soup than heaven.” Hector responded sarcastically. The big religions all seemed to have similar results where the followers worked for all their lives really hard or over several lives only to get sucked up into some nothingness that had no location and no witness that this place really existed. Then came the silly ones.

“Here is one where after you die, you go to a large roller rink where you play roller dodge ball for eternity.” Philippe reported.

“Here is one where you get your own planet and you get to have hundreds of wives and you become a god yourself.” Sydney read from his clipboard. “Hector I don’t know about this one. I can’t keep up with the wife I have, hundreds just seems silly.” He concluded and Hector agreed.

“Here is one where you where mouse ears and go on rides for eternity.” Reported Reginald.

“That’s not heaven, that’s Disneyland!” Hector objected. Gentlemen, these are all really dopey heavens. I want something we can verify, something that is worthy of a persons eternal soul. Something that doesn’t sound like a comic book. Find me a heaven that can be verified with witnesses.” And he sent his scientists out for another month of research. Finally, they gathered for their final reports and it didn’t go much better. Scientist after scientist presented their report but there was no proof.

“We have to have a witness, someone who has been to heaven and came back to give us the details. Does anybody have such a heaven?”

“I do.” The shy voice from the back. It was Lucy, the daughter of Reginald who was only in the fifth grade. She wasn’t even a scientist but Hector was desperate.

“Then share your findings with the scientific community Lucy, come speak into the microphone.” The little girl walked to the front carrying a mysterious looking book in her hands. Then she spoke.

“It’s all in this book. It’s an ancient book of writings and listen to this. ‘Nobody can tell you about heaven except someone who has been there and returned again to take you there.’”

“EXACTLY!” Hector shouted with excitement. “Read more little girl.”

“Ok” said Lucy and she read “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Lucy finished reading.

“Who said these words? This person is the witness of what Heaven is like that we need!.” Hector said frantically.

“It’s Jesus.” Lucy answered holding up the book. “And the book is the Bible that everybody has in their houses. Jesus came down from heaven to take us there. He tells us all about it. Listen to how it will be:” she said and then she opened the book to read again.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. And it had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written there. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.”

“This is the proof we all need.” Hector prepared. This little girl has brought the evidence that everyone needs to know that there is a heaven, what it looks like and that there is a witness and how to get there. Wait a minute, how do we get there Lucy?” Hector asked.

“You accept Jesus into your heart and you become a new creature and then when everybody is ready, Jesus will come back and take us all there himself and we will have new bodies and never get sick or die or be sad ever again, forever and ever and ever.” Lucy answered confidently.

“Hector, I vote that we all go to the lab and have Lucy show us how to get Jesus in our hearts so we can go to Heaven for more research.” Philippe moved and all the scientists cheered for joy at the suggestion.

And Lucy did just that. She took them to the chapel instead of the lab but one by one each scientist came to know Jesus and became a new creature and they prepared their report that pointed to the one place we all have but so many of us never look, the Bible with the roadmap and proof that there is a Heaven and that God has a plan for us to live there forever.

35

The Beggar Prince

Value: The Lost

Explanation to teachers and parents. I do not usually have to explain the theme of a children's story but this one may be misinterpreted. In this story of a prince who is lost from his kingdom, it might be easy to interpret the prince as being Jesus himself, the son of the King who came to live with us on sinful earth. But that is not the intent of this story. The prince represents each of us as children of God who are not aware that our father is the King and deliberately do not enter into our inheritance and remain lost in the squalor and poverty of sin. JM

“THE SON OF THE KING IS LOST!” The cry went out from runners on horseback who galloped through every street, every village, every field and forest of the kingdom with the terrible news. Young prince Roger was missing. The King was frantic to find his only son. Posters showing his face were up on every tree and wall that could bear his image. The reward as more than most peasants could even count much less inherit and the search for the child royalty was the all that the people of the kingdom could talk about.

Even in the beggar's village, the anxiety for the lost prince was noticeable. While the poor, the homeless, the sick and the outcasts that were citizens of this village were often too absorbed with survival and finding safe and peaceful places to sleep and eat, the thought of their beloved prince being lost, stolen or dead was heartbreaking to them. The prince was the darling of the kingdom. At only twelve, every boy wanted to be him, every girl his future bride and every parent his future in laws..

Godfrey lived in the beggar village with his uncle Sven although he rarely saw his Uncle because he was often off finding food for them or trying to get honest work. So Godfrey had time in the village to make friends and even play, like the other boys and girls of rich people could do. To a beggar a rich person is just someone with a real mom and dad, a house to live in, clothes that were clean and new, a school to go to and enough to eat not to mention presents at Christmas.

Godfrey went down to the “playground” which was an area of the city that various boxes, tubes and broken toys that were thrown away by people who were not beggars threw away were gathered for the children to play with during the day. Uncle Sven organized this playground so somebody made sure the things there were “safe” or as safe as a playground in a beggars village could be. As Godfrey was trying to take apart a broken

tool, he looked up and saw a boy he did not recognize. He walked over to introduce himself.

“Hello, my name is Godfrey. Who are you?”

“I don’t know.” The boy answered mysteriously.

“What do you mean you don’t know? You know your name and who you live with don’t you?” Godfrey objected.

“No. I forgot everything. I don’t know my name and I don’t live with anyone. Someone found me wandering on the streets of Kingdom City and they brought me here because they said beggars have to live here. I don’t think I have a name. I am not anybody.”

Godfrey found this new boy very strange. Even beggars usually know who they are. But instead of being nosey, the boys just played together and became friends. They met every day and made up games from the thrown away junk that was kept in the beggar’s playground. One day they were walking on the roads outside the beggar’s village when Godfrey saw one of the signs for the lost prince. Instantly he stopped and stared.

“What’s wrong, Godfrey” the boy with no name asked.

“Look, there on the sign is a drawing of the Prince of the Kingdom who is lost. Look at it. That drawing looks just like you.” Both boys stared but the nameless boy could not see it. It was clear as can be to Godfrey that the nameless boy looked exactly like Prince Roger.

“Well I am not Prince Roger.” The nameless boy objected. “Look at me. Do I look or act like a prince? If I had run away from the castle, wouldn’t I be in prince’s clothing? Wake up Godfrey. I don’t think there even is a Prince or a King or a Kingdom. Everybody is just rotting away in their own beggars villages every where.”

How could Godfrey get the lost and forgetful Prince Roger to look up and see who he really is? He seemed so down, so lost, so convinced that the very real path to salvation and glories and riches just did not exist when Godfrey knew full well it did. The next day, they were exploring unopened cans in the playground when Godfrey spotted a glimmer under the lost boy’s shirt.

“Let me look at something.” He warned the nameless boy. “Don’t get nervous, I won’t hurt you.” And he put his hand under the collar of his shirt and found a chain. Pulling it up there was a bright gold medallion hanging from the solid silver chain. “Look at this. Did you know this was there?” Godfrey asked.

“No, it’s a surprise to me.” The boy answered.

“Look at it. Its solid gold and the chain is silver. Look at the inscription. It says ‘To my precious only son Roger’ and the symbol on it is the symbol of the King. Can’t you see? The King has put his mark on you that you will be his royal son forever and this mark can give you your inheritance. We just have to get you back to the King.” Godfrey explained with a voice that was both excited and full of compassion for the lost boy.

“Well ok. I’ll play your little game if you want me to.” The lost prince finally conceded but not with very much conviction. Godfrey asked some people and found out how to make his way to Kingdom City. He got a little food and the two beggar boys made their way to the home of the King. Once there, Godfrey was able to find back alleys and passageways to get the lost Prince to the gate of the palace. There he told his friend to just walk into the courtyard and his friend did as he was asked to do.

“IT’S THE PRINCE!” The hubbub went up like a riot. The excitement shot through the castle and far off in the castle walls, Godfrey could hear the King shouting “MY SON? MY SON HAS COME BACK TO ME? BRING HIM TO ME?” and the love in that father’s voice almost made Godfrey cry. Godfrey repeated his route back out of Kingdom City and into the quiet Beggars village and went to the playground to think but when he got there, he was shocked at what he saw. There sat the royal King Roger, in his old beggar’s clothes playing with a stone.

“Why are you here?” Godfrey asked terribly upset that the prince was not at home with his family. “You are Prince Roger. You should be on the throne, ruling the universe with your father.” He cried.

“Godfrey, I appreciate your efforts but that was all just a game. There is no King, no Kingdom and I am just a beggar, just like you.” He said and that depressed statement of blindness to his royal inheritance upset Godfrey so much, he went home where his Uncle Sven was home at last from his work. Godfrey told his Uncle all about the Prince and how they had traveled to the King but the Prince just could not understand his inheritance.

“Well it’s like all of us sometimes, Godfrey.” Uncle Sven said lovingly. “We are all Children of God and are heirs to His vast fortunes. The cattle of every hill are His and He want us to live in his love and joy but so many times we live in sin and poverty, refusing to see the wealth that is already ours. Go and get the young prince. We will feed him and care for him and pray for him that God will open his eyes to who he really is, the son of the most high King.”

Godfrey did that and along the way he prayed for himself and the other beggars and for all of us that all of us would understand who we really are, the children of the Master of the Universe and the sons and daughters of a God who will give all to us, if we will just live with him and let him live in us.

Easter in the Garden

Value: Easter – The Resurrection of Christ

Amy and Amber loved Easter. They loved the pretty dresses and hats they got to wear and all the ladies at church wore. They loved the story of Jesus rising from the dead and the flowers and the candy and of course, the Easter Bunny and Easter egg hunts. Usually on Saturday, they went to the one in Central Park with all the kids. Mommy and Daddy always hid lots of eggs all over the house and in the garden.

One of Amy and Ambers favorite things to do is to get up really early on Easter morning and go out in the garden and find all the eggs Mommy and Daddy hid there last night before their parents ever even got up. They always surprised Mommy and Daddy with full baskets of Easter eggs already gathered before they even woke up.

This year they did extra good because Amy and Amber got up just before the sun came up. They quickly got into their Easter robes and slippers and tried to be quiet for all the giggling as they slipped into the garden. Mommy kept a huge garden that had rows and rows of flowers and plants and paths that went back to some land Daddy used to dump the trimmings when he mowed the lawn. Amy searched for eggs around the lily pond and Amber near the Azalea bushes when Amber suddenly called to her twin sister.

“Amy come here. I have never seen this path before.” Amy ran to her sister and saw what she had found. It was a new path but it didn’t look new. It looked very old because it was laid in with huge granite stones and it rose like it was going up a hill which none of the others did. Amber was a little nervous about following the strange path but before she knew it Amy started stepping up the stones and moving further up the hill so Amber joined her. Both were very curious about this Easter mystery.

The path wound around and twisted but it was always an uphill climb until suddenly it leveled out and they were in a clearing. “What is this place Amber?” whispered Amy and the girls held hands as they bravely explored further. As they walked in tiny little steps, suddenly Amber stopped.

“Look at that.” She said and Amy saw what she saw. It was a huge cave and there was a massive stone lying on the ground and there was stuff lying around like someone had been here and run away. Just then, the sun peeked over the eastern horizon and at that same exact moment, a light burst from the cave door that was brighter than the sunrise. “Amy,” Amber said with a frightened, shy whisper, “do you think this is the....”

“I don’t know Amber.” Amy whispered back “Let’s go see.”

Slowly they inched forward until they were at the opening of the cave. They peeked around and there He was. Sitting on the edge of a large slab looking at his hands and praying, dressed all in white with strips of grave wrapping lying at his feet, he was preparing to stand up.”

“Jesus?” Amber said in awe, shock and feeling the love she had for him come up. As she said that, Jesus looked at her and smiled a smile that made them know it could only be him and that the love of God was bursting from him.

“Hello Amy and Amber.” He said in his soft loving voice. Then he extended his arms. “Come see me.”

The twins ran to their Savior and jumped into his arms. “Jesus did you just get rose from the dead?” Amy said kissing the backs of his hands.

“Yes Amy.” Jesus answered and they felt the joy that was in him flowing to them. For what seemed like hours he talked to them about how much he loved them and how much he loved his disciples and all sinners and that he came to earth to take everyone who loved him to Heaven.

“Now girls, I must go see my disciples. I want you to go back down the hill to your parents and then go out and tell everyone you know about what you saw here and that I rose from the dead to give them eternal life so they will never die. Promise?”

“WE PROMISE JESUS” and they kissed him and they ran out of the cave passing two ladies who were coming up the path. Then they ran all the way home and there was mommy making her special Easter breakfast. But Amy and Amber never forgot to tell everyone about Jesus and how he rose from the dead to save us. And we should never forget the true meaning of Easter either and tell everyone we know of the amazing miracle of Easter morning.

37

A Bad Dream

Value: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

“DAD how dare you look in my diary?” Max screamed at his father in fury. Chuck was red with anger at his little boy for what he read in that diary.

“How dare you lie to me? You said you would never smoke a cigarette and right here in this diary, you confess you have. Your promises are no good to me now Max!” Chuck yelled at his young son.

“Well my privacy is ruined. How I can ever trust you again!” Max said crying.

“Me? Its you who lied and I can never trust you again. I wish I never had a son.” Chuck said and right away he was sorry he said that. Max burst into tears and ran out the door to go down the block to his friends house to hide. Chuck slammed his hand down on the counter and hurt it. He hated fighting with his son. Parents hate it when their children

are mad at them. It hurts them way down inside but sometimes they are proud and don't know how to make things are ok.

"That kid drives me crazy." Chuck fumed thinking of what he read in that diary. "Let him go. I will just take a nap." And with that Chuck laid down on his sofa and went soundly to sleep.

Chuck woke up suddenly and looked around. It wasn't his bedroom but some other place. He was on a flat white stone sleeping and there was no furniture and everything was dark all around him.

"Fluffy, where are you fluffy?" Chuck heard a familiar sound.

"Grandpa?" Chuck said as the elderly man walked past him looking for his dog. He said curious of how this could be considering Chuck's grandfather went to be with Jesus long ago.

"Why hello little Chucky, are you ok?"

"Yes Grandpa, just didn't expect to see you. Where are we?"

"Well I am in heaven. I am looking for our dog Fluffy. You remember Fluffy? You loved him so much. Well he is here now and he still likes to run away. Where are you Fluffy! Say, I am not sure why you are here. Is something wrong Chucky?"

"Well I sort of had a fight with Max and I guess that is on my mind. Oh yeah, Max is my son, your great grandson. He looks a lot like you Grandpa."

"Aww, well I am sure he is a spark plug like you and your dad were growing up. Listen, the only regret I have from my life is that I went to heaven with some people who had not forgiven me. You probably don't know this that when I died, I was not speaking to your mother, my daughter. It was something silly now that I look back on it but I wish I had apologized and got past it so I could have hugged her before...."

"ARF ARF."

"Oh there you are Fluffy. Gotta run now. I have to get Fluffy home. Grandma is waiting supper on us." Chuck's grandfather said and then he was gone. Chuck didn't know exactly what to make of it when he looked up and a large powerful man walked past him as he sat on the slab. The man walked like he had someplace important to go and did not look to the right or left.

"Dad?" Chuck said with amazement. The big man stopped in his tracks and looked at Chuck curiously.

“Son? Is that you? What are you doing here? Wait a minute. Are you asleep?” The big man asked.

“Well no Dad. Well, ummm, yes, I think so.” Chuck confessed.

“I thought so.” Chuck’s deceased father said with his big barrel laugh. “Ok spill it, what did you do wrong. When you were a kid, you always took a nap when you had done something wrong.”

“Well, it’s Max. He and I had a fight. I read his diary which was wrong but found out he lied to me which made me really mad and now I can’t forgive him.” Chuck told his father, the one guy he could always talk to.

“Chuck do you think you have ever been forgiven?” His Dad asked.

“Well, by you maybe, a few times.”

“Try 10,316 times Chuck. But that’s not what I mean. Who forgave you of everything and made it possible for you to go to heaven?”

Chuck thought for a moment and then he remembered his Sunday school classes when he was a child. “JESUS. That’s it isn’t it? He died on the cross so I could be forgiven.” Chuck said with excitement for getting the right answer.

“That’s right Chuck. God forgave us all of lots worse things than Max has done. And if He was willing to give his life for our forgiveness. It’s the least you can do to forgive Max, ask his forgiveness too. Do it now son, before it’s too late.” And with that Chuck’s dad stood and began to fade out.

“Wait dad, I wanted to ask you about how to build a shed.”

“No time now son. I have to go. Have you seen your Grandpa? He just stepped out to walk Fluffy.” And he was gone.

Suddenly Chuck woke up with a start. He realized he was home now but the visits from his ancestors had not been for nothing. Suddenly he heard the door to the house open. “Max is that you?”

Max entered the room looking very sad and staring down. Chuck stood up and put his hands on his shoulders and just said, “I’m sorry.” To stop themselves from crying (which men don’t like to do), Chuck and Max hugged and Chuck knew he would never let some little issue come between him and his son again.

Value: Blessed are the Merciful

“What do you mean I do it wrong?> All coyotes hunt.” Rodney defended himself when his best friend George Coyote accused him of being “too cruel” when he hunted. Rodney was right about one thing. All coyotes and in fact, every living thing hunts for its food and that is the way God created the world to be for now. There is a whispered belief in the coyote community that a world will be one day where all creatures would be at peace together and God would provide all the food and nobody would have to hunt or be hunted but that’s not the way it is now so Rodney knew his instinct to hunt was not evil.

But Rodney had a love of the hunt that was far more intense than any other coyote he knew. He lived for the hunt. But it wasn’t just hunting that he loved. He loved to corner a rabbit or small animal and see how terrified it was and make it stay like that instead of using the methods his mother and uncles taught him to hunt quickly and efficiently. No, to Rodney, the stalking and “playing with” his pray was exciting.

“That’s what I am talking about.” George said. It’s kind of gross Rodney so why don’t we hunt separately for a while.

George’s scolding and change so he couldn’t hunt with the pack upset Rodney but he considered them all to be just weak and not as good as hunting as he. So he hunted alone. “I might as well hunt alone.” He said to himself since he was the only one still talking to him. “I am the only real expert at it. Who needs the pack anyway when I WHOOP.....”

Rodney felt himself falling and then there was a THUNK. The "Thunk" was Rodney hitting the bottom. Rodney had toppled down a steep incline that dropped off at the end about 20 feet from the bottom. He stood up and looked around. It wasn’t a pit like the hunters use to capture wild animals. It was a ravine that used to be a dead end canyon but it had been closed off after a rockslide. Three of the walls were sheer slick wall that went up 20 feet before there was a ledge which then sloped up to where Rodney had fallen from. The fourth wall was solid rock from the landslide and unclimbable.

Now Rodney knew what the pack was for. Suddenly he was terrified at being trapped at the bottom like this. Rodney was trapped. He paced from end to end of the tiny space he had to himself and tried his best to figure out how to escape but no good. He yelped for help but no good. He was starting to panic. He knew very well that he could starve to death in this pit without anyone even knowing he was here. “This couldn’t get much worse.” Rodney said to himself pacing and trying to leap up the walls only to fall with a painful YELP!

Then it got worse. Night began to settle in. As Rodney strained his eyes to see if anyone was coming to help him, he saw a huge shadow pass over the ridge. Then that shadow moved down the embankment and settled in on a very wide flat bed of grass right above the 20 foot rock wall. Rodney froze in place but did not make a sound for fear of what it could be. He hunkered down in fear trembling and finally fell asleep.

Before Rodney opened his coyote eyes, he heard the rumble. It was like a loud roar of one of the human engines but different. It was an animal. And it was coming from where that dark shape was last night. It was almost like a purr but very very loud. Slowly he let one eye open and then he squeezed it shut in terror. It could not be. But he forced his eyes open and it was true. What sat on that ledge was as large as a small rhinoceros but it was covered in a smooth matt of stripped fur that could only belong to one being. They said it was a myth, something someone made up to scare little coyotes but there he was. It was Havohej, the Great Tiger. He stared directly at the tiny coyote with piercing eyes but he did not blink. And he was purring.

“Wake up little one.” The mighty tiger spoke. Rodney reluctantly opened his eyes and stood to face his doom.

“Are you Havohej, the Great Tiger?” He said with his voice quivering.

“Yes and I know you. You are Rodney, the cowardly coyote who makes his hunt a game of terror for those he finds, who finds cruelty to be fun and a way to take joy where there is none inside you.”

“Are you going to kill me?” Rodney said his voice seeming squeaky and small more like a mouse than a predatory coyote. Suddenly a mighty roar burst from the chest of the powerful cat. The roar was so startling and powerful it blew Rodney off his feet and he hit the wall opposite where Hovohej was laying.

“Truly you deserve to be killed and eaten. Justice would even call for terror to enter you before your doom. But redemption is a more powerful law than revenge.”

Then Havohej did something Rodney did not expect. He rose and walked with huge cat strides to the loose rock where the landslide had occurred. He looked at the stones piled there and then he crouched and released a massive roar 10 times more earth shattering than the first one. Rodney just put his head between his paws and whimpered at the cat’s terrible anger. But instead of leaping to the pit to destroy the tiny coyote, something else happened. A huge stone was loosened by the roar of the Great Tiger. It teetered in place and then suddenly, it toppled into the pit giving Rodney a perfect stepping stone to escape. Havohej returned to where he had been laying and turned his back on Rodney and laid his head down showing that he was not watching.

Quick as he could climb Rodney was up and out of the pit. He stood at the top of the incline looking down at the mysterious beast. He started to run away and join the hunt for he was very hungry but something stopped him and he went back. He began down the incline toward the huge cat and then he sat in front of Havohej straight up, ears perked at stared at the wide face of the sleeping Tiger. Finally one eye of the cat opened and he said “What is it you want little coyote?”

“Why?” Rodney asked. It was all that needed to be said. Hovohej raised his powerful regal head and looked into the eyes of the little beast and then he spoke.

“Hunting is noble and to be done with dignity and grace. You have heard the law of the jungle is survival of the fittest. That is incorrect. The law of the jungle is mercy. It is that way because the law of the creator of all life is mercy. He gives mercy to us, his creation and to his chief creation, mankind when he sent his son to redeem this fallen place. So too, I gave mercy to you and you give mercy to others. And every act of mercy you give will be as though you are the servant of the most high himself. Go little coyote and live in mercy, live in peace and live in the grace of your creator. Do this and you will never go hungry.”

With that, Havohej stood and leapt seemingly straight up and disappeared into the jungle. At that moment, he knew that the Great Tiger did not come to destroy Rodney. He came to teach him, about his creator and his son who died even for a lowly coyote. He came to teach him how to live in the image of that great creator. Instead of death, Havohej gave life and instead of becoming a meal, Rodney became a beloved member of the jungle society not because of his great skill at the hunt but because of his great mercy.

39

All the Little Lemurs

Value: Blessed are the Pure of Heart

All little lemurs love to play. They play all the day and every day they play. Why any day that a little lemur doesn't play is a bad day for a baby lemur. Little lemurs know hundreds of games. They know hundreds of games because they make up dozens of games every day. Sometimes they play a game that has no rules, no objective and nobody knows when it ends or who ever wins. The idea is just to play, play, play, play, play. Mommies of little Lemurs know their babies are healthy when they play from the moment they wake up until the moment they lay in their cribs to sleep and when they are asleep, they dream of playing.

But the mommy of little Lloyd Lemur was worried. Lloyd didn't seem to want to run out into the field to run and jump and play with the other little lemurs. He didn't want to climb up and down hills and rocks and fallen trees and spring out at his friends chasing them or being chased or sometimes not even knowing which but knowing it was all great clean fun. Lloyd had a friend named Levi. Levi and Lloyd loved to be in secret. They hid from the other lemurs and whispered all the time. They had special ways of walking and wore special things on their ears and skin to make them look like they were in a secret society that was much better than the community of fun loving lemurs that played in the field every day.

Lloyd wasn't always this way. But he and Levi started having secrets and before long, that's all they wanted to do. They stayed inside whispering and making up codes and

they never exercised so lots of time Lloyd felt sick. This was hard for him because nobody was ever sick because everybody lived pure, open happy lives so nobody understood how he felt. Levi and Lloyd loved to make plans that nobody knew about. They always seemed to have something cooked up and no matter how much Lloyd's sister Lexy Lemur begged, Lloyd said she couldn't be in the club because it had to be a secret. He even pretended there was something more holy and special about being in his secret club with its strange rituals and vows of silence.

Lloyd and Levi never got any exercise and nobody talked to them because they talked nonstop about their secret club but wouldn't tell the other lemurs about it because it was a secret. Lexy Lemur was worried about her brother. She remembered when Lloyd ran and laughed and played with her and the other baby lemurs all day long and never had a care in the world. He was by far the silliest, happiest lemur of them all before the secret club.

Then came the nightmares. Lloyd started waking up with terrible dreams. Dreams of deep dark monsters coming to get him and nobody could help him because he was in a secret club with the monsters. He woke up at night crying from the dreams and Lexy Lemur ran to him.

"Lloyd you are not happy and carefree any more. What happened? Your secret club has made you all worried and scared and dark inside. You know all good little lemurs have a pure love of play. Where is your purity Lloyd?" Asked Lexy. The next day she took him out into the field when all the little lemurs were leaping and laughing and screaming in joy but Lloyd just sat on his bottom on the ground and cried.

"I have lost my lemur purity Lexy. I am a lost lemur." He moaned.

"What happened in your club? You always seemed to have plans with the club and lemurs don't plan Lloyd, lemurs play." She asked.

"Yes, we had lots of secret plans. We played jokes on the other lemurs so they would fall off of things or things would happen to them and then we would laugh. We had all kinds of secret plans and games we did that nobody knew about and schemes. I was a scheming lemur Lexy. I don't want to be a scheming lemur, I want to be playing, laughing lemur. What can I do?" He cried.

So they went to the wise old owl who looked after all of the lemurs. There Lloyd poured out his soul to the wise old owl in hopes he would have some magic to make him pure and simple again.

"Well there is a magic but it's not from me little lemur." Mr. Owl confessed. "God created all lemurs to be pure in heart. But you have used up your purity Lloyd." Said Mr. Owl and Lloyd started to cry loudly. "Now stop that, there is hope. If you will pray that the spirit of purity come inside you from God, he can change you into a completely new lemur, one that is pure and happy inside again."

“Oh yes, yes, Mr. Owl. Please teach me how to ask God for that.”

So Mr. Owl and Lexy and Lloyd all prayed and the miracle did happen. His dark schemer lemur heart was filled with God and he discovered all over again that the love of God is what made lemurs happy and playful in the first place. He forgot all about having secrets and worries and how to just run and play and trust God with everything else and he was a brand new creature. And before long, he once again had regained his title of silliest lemur in the whole field.

40

Eagles and Bears

Value: Blessed are the Peacemakers

The war had been going on for centuries. The war between the Eagles and the Bears. Nobody in the forest knew what started the war. But everyone knew how often Bears were injured terribly or killed by dive bombing Eagles or just as often Eagles were killed in large numbers by sudden attacks by Bears or as they dove and the Bears swatted them from the sky. Far too often the ones hurt the most were the children or babies or mommies of the baby Eagles and Bears who wanted nothing more than peace to raise their children.

Nevertheless, rumor had been in the air for a long time of a war to end all wars. A final battle was coming that would pit every Bear in the woods against every Eagle and a final victor will emerge. But nobody knew when that day would come. But that day did come, before anyone was prepared for it. It came about when Bartholomew Bear was playing in the woods by himself. He wasn't supposed to do that but sometimes children forget the warnings of their parents because they want so much to explore and learn. He was chasing a butterfly laughing and leaping at it from a log to a stump to a rock and then to the ground.

Suddenly he felt a shooting pain in his foot. He cried out before he even knew what happened but he heard the SNAP of that man trap closed on his foot and he knew he was in big trouble. He must have cried for hours wishing his Mommy or Daddy would come. Little did he know they were preparing for the final battle, the war to end all wars with the Eagles.

The butterfly lit on his bear shoulder. “Can't you get your foot out Bartholomew?” The butterfly said. “I want to play some more.”

“NO,” the little Bear cried big tears in his eyes. “This trap has my leg in these pointy claws and it really hurts.”

“There is another one right next to it.” Mr. Butterfly observed. “Make sure you don't get your other foot in it. I will fly for help.”

“Yes please hurry.” The sad little Bear begged his friend. It was not long later that Bartholomew saw his help coming. Dozens and dozens of bears appeared on the ridge. “Wow they sent everyone” he remarked to himself as more and more Bears lined up on that ridge and just stood there staring over at the other ridge on the opposite side of the valley Bartholomew was in.

On the other side, the army of the Eagles were gathering. Filling the trees of the thick forest there, they dug their talons in and stared hatefully at the army of Bears just across the way not knowing the poor helpless Bear cub was trapped between them.

“DADDY HELP ME!” Bartholomew’s voice suddenly rang out. Both armies looked into the valley and recognized the plight of the child Bear. He was crying loudly as he looked up spotting his Mommy and Daddy in the Bear army on the ridge. Oh, the hearts of that Mommy and Daddy were torn seeing their child in that spot. When the battle begins in just moments, the two armies will rush into that valley and the killing will be most awful.

The Chieftain of the Eagles watched the little Bear. His heart was touched but not enough to call off the attack. “Daddy we have to stop it.” His son Edgar Eagle said to him perched on the same branch with him.

“No son.” The king of the Eagles declared. “We can only hope somehow the Bear child survives the battle.” The Chieftain of the Eagles watched the situation, unwilling to call the attack but unwilling to call it off. He did not see the tiny Mr. Butterfly light on the beak of Edgar Eagle.

The entire army of Bears were in anguish watching Bartholomew struggle. But despite the beggins of Bartholomew’s Mommy and Daddy, the King of the Bears would not call off the attack. The clamor for war began to rise and Bartholomew was terribly afraid. Suddenly, before the call to attack, a lone eagle soared out from the wooded side of the valley ridge. All eyes were glued to that lone figure as it did several near spins and spiraled down in long elegant arches toward the stranded Bartholomew. All of a sudden, the king of the Eagles knew who it was.

“EDGAR!” The cry went out and both armies tensed knowing the son of the King of the eagles had gone into the valley first. He landed at the side of the frightened Bear and looked at his injured leg. “Don’t worry.” Edgar said to Bartholomew. “I come to help” but as he moved around assessing the problem. SNAP the other trap closed on Edgar’s foot. While Edgar was a soldier, the pain of the trap caused him to cry out in misery.

Without a call to war, suddenly two figures burst from either side of the valley. The King of the Eagles shot from the ranks to the aid of his son and the king of the Bears rushed to help the fallen Bartholomew. Seeing their kings rush to save the children, both sides suddenly dropped their armor and weapons and rushed into the valley. The thunderous

stampede was not a charge to battle and death but to save the precious youth and for mercy.

Within moments, the two armies were working like a single-minded people to free the children. The Bears had the strength to pull open the traps and the Eagles the keen eyesight and ability to figure out the mechanisms so they opened them safely. Slowly and carefully, the traps were pulled from the legs of Bartholomew and Edger and they were free. Bartholomew rushed to the arms of the king of the Bears weeping with gratitude and Edger to the king of the Eagles embracing him for stopping the attack to save their lives. Then, just as though it was the natural thing to do, Bartholomew ran to the king of the Eagles and embraced him and Edgar wept in the arms of the King of the Bears.

A thunderous shout of celebration went up from both armies. The war was over forever. Never again would the Bears and the Eagles live in warfare but instead they would be brothers and friends for eternity. And all because the son of the King was willing to fly into the valley and was willing to give his life to save his enemy and give him life instead of death.

41

The Joy of Stephen

Value: Blessed are those who are persecuted

Julie and Phillip were always a little nervous when their Daddy took them with him to share Jesus door to door in town. But daddy always loved to do it so they went to learn how. Usually the Assistant Pastor from their church went along. Mostly people were nice and sometimes invited them in and sometimes the Pastor or Daddy would pray with the people to accept Jesus and that was really exciting.

One time though a man answered the door who wasn't from our country. His skin was darker and he wore one of those turban things on his head. And when daddy shared about Jesus, the man got really mad and started yelling and seemed like he was going to come out and hurt daddy so the Pastor excused them from the man and they went to a bench nearby in the apartment complex.

"What was wrong with that man Daddy? Why did he have that hat on his head?" Phillip asked frightened.

"That is a man God loves just like he loves you and me Phillip. Now let's pray for him." And they did right there on the bench and they all felt better.

That night Daddy explained that the man was from another religion so he just didn't understand that they were there to give him eternal life. "But Daddy," Phillip interrupted. "It seemed like he wanted to hurt us. Does that mean what we were doing was wrong?"

“Kids do remember the story of Stephen in the Bible?” Daddy said and before they knew it, Daddy was telling them the story. Daddy was an amazing storyteller because he was able to make Julie and Phillip feel like they were right there in the story.

“Where are we Daddy?” Phillip shook his head looking around at the huge crowd of what seemed to be really angry people. Phillip and Julie felt their Daddy holding onto their hands as he took them right into the bible story he was telling.

“We are in the story, Phillip. These people are all angry with Stephen. See over there?”

The children worked their way between the legs of the shouting people and then they saw him. Standing apart from the crowd, dressed all in white. “Phillip!” Julie whispered. “That’s Stephen, just like Daddy said.”

“Kids over here.” They heard their Daddy whisper and they ran to him knelt between some people watching.

“Why are they all so mad Daddy?” Asked Julie a little scared and nervous for Stephen.

“They don’t want him to share about Jesus, sweetie.” Her Daddy answered.

“Daddy, he doesn’t even look scared. I would be SO scared if everybody was mad at me.” Phillip said watching Stephen with amazement.

”Can you hear what he is saying kids?” Daddy whispered and they listened close.

“He is praising Jesus Daddy.” Julie finally said. “He is thanking Jesus that he is going to be able to suffer and die for God. Daddy I don’t understand.” She said sobbing a little bit.

“Well honey, Jesus died for us so it’s a privilege to go through those things for him. Stephen is full of the Holy Ghost so he isn’t suffering at all. See his face, it’s full of joy. That’s what the Holy Spirit does when we go through hard things for Jesus. He replaces the fear and pain with joy and praise. Come on, we better get back, Mommy will have supper ready soon.”

As they moved to the back of the crowd, Julie saw a wrap that looked like it belonged to Stephen. She reached to pick it up but an older boy picked it up first. She looked him in the eyes.

“Why are you crying?” She asked the boy.

“I have always hated Christians, little girl” the boy said. “But Stephen has so much joy. The joy of Stephen makes me somehow want that in my heart.”

Back home at the supper table they told Mommy all about their adventure. “Well, Julie, who was that boy you talked to before you came home.”

“I don’t know Mommy. He said his name was Saul of Tarsus.” They didn’t talk about it any more but Mommy and Daddy exchanged knowing smiles and both knew that Daddy would be taking the children on another journey to find out more about how this Saul boy turned out.

42

Loving Bullies

Value: Love your Enemies

Rocco and Butch were the worst bullies in school. Every day they wandered the halls and everybody tried to stay out of their way. Sometimes they beat up the boys but more often, they pulled girl’s hair or teased them until they cried. Nobody knew what to do about Rocco and Butch so everyone just learned to stay away from them but if they did catch you, you should cry right away because that made them happy and they would go to the next person to bully.

One day a new girl started school in the fifth grade. Her name was Holly and the rumor went around fast that she was the daughter of the new Pastor at the Methodist church which was the biggest church in town. Cindy and Holly became friends right away and Cindy knew she had to warn Holly about the bullies pretty fast but it was too late. As Cindy turned the corner in the halls to her locker, she saw Rocco and Butch beginning to bully Holly. They were teasing her and laughing but Holly didn’t cry. “Cry Holly, cry.” Cindy whispered under her breath hoping Holly would get the message but she didn’t.

The bell rang and soon the halls were filled with kids and everyone was running out to the bus or to get picked up by their parents in the pick up line so Cindy didn’t get a chance to find out what happened. But the next day she ran up to Holly as soon as she saw her. “Holly, I saw you talked to Rocco and Butch. I wanted to warn you about them. They are really mean bullies. So be careful.”

Holly just smiled a big happy smile and said “Ok Cindy. Don’t worry.”

Rocco saw Holly at her locker before Butch did. “Hey Butch, there’s that new girl.” He commented.

“Something is different about her.” Butch said. But they walked toward her their usual scary walk that usually made kids run away. “Hey it’s the preacher’s kid. I bet the preacher’s kid is the worst kid of all. That’s what they say about preacher’s children you know.” Butch taunted her. That’s when Holly did something so unexpected that both bullies just froze in place not knowing what to say.

“Oh hi Butch. Hi Rocco. I was hoping to see you today.” And she gave them the biggest smile either of them had ever seen. Her smile was so pretty and full of friendship and love that they were paralyzed. “Oh, I saw you had a snickers bar in your pocket yesterday Rocco.” She continued. “We have a bunch of those so I asked mommy if I could bring you some and she said yes and she said you sounded like super nice boys and you can come over to play video games at our church youth night this weekend if you want to.”

Then Holly put a candy bar in each boys hand and hugged them both and ran off to class singing a happy song and skipping.

“What just happened?” Rocky said finally, when he could speak again. Butch didn’t know but he liked it. Then when they recovered their senses, they saw what seemed to be the whole school staring at what just happened and how a little blond girl caused the meanest bullies in the school to stop in their places and she hugged them and skipped away singing.

The next day was more amazing yet. Instead of wandering the halls, pushing people’s books out of their hands and pushing girls down, Rocco and Butch went straight to Holly. And instead of those mean smirking ugly smiles that meant they were going to hurt her, they glowed as she talked to them. Cindy watched in the amazement as Holly talked to them for several minutes during the lunch hour and at the end she hugged them again and the two bullies went outside and didn’t bully any people for the rest of the day. That way Friday, so everyone was so curious about what was going to happen on Monday.

Monday was so amazing it was almost impossible for the kids and even the teachers to believe. Rocco and Butch showed up in regular clothes, not bully clothes and they were smiling and even seemed a little shy. But when they saw Holly, they ran to her and hugged her. Cindy saw this and thought she even saw Butch cry a little bit. The bell rang and they went to class. After class, she finally got a chance to talk to Holly.

“What did you do to Rocco and Butch, Holly?” She asked eagerly.

“I loved them.” Holly answered happily. “They are really very sweet. I will introduce you to them at lunch. Rocco is way funny.” She giggled.

“You loved them?” Cindy said in amazement. “But they are bullies.” She objected.

“The Bible says to love your enemies and you know what amazing thing happens when you love your enemies Cindy?”

“What?”

“They stop being enemies and then you don’t have enemies any more. That’s what my daddy taught me and what he preaches every Sunday and he does that because that is what Jesus taught.” Holly continued. “I invited Rocco and Butch to church and youth

group and Sunday night they accepted Jesus and they are going to join our youth group and instead of using their talents to hurt people, they are going to learn to go on missions trips next summer.”

And just as Holly said, Rocco and Butch not only stopped being bullies, they became the most popular boys in school. In fact, no bullies could do anything in Cindy’s school because Rocco and Butch knew all the bullies and wouldn’t let them hurt people and started sharing Jesus with them.

“How did you have the courage to love them, Holly?” Cindy said with awe.

“It doesn’t take courage Cindy.” Holly answered. “It’s what Jesus wants us all to do so if you obey him and share his love with others, they will follow Jesus too and before long, everybody will love God and serve him. Wouldn’t that be so cool?”

And Cindy had to admit. She saw it work with Rocco and Butch so what Jesus taught about loving enemies proved to be a truly miraculous teaching that Holly showed everybody how to live out at their school that year.

43

What Does God Like?

Value: Worship

Lee and Larry loved their sixth birthday party. Even though they were twins, Mommy and Daddy always made sure they each had a special time. And with their birthdays coming in December, Mommy and Daddy also always made sure their birthdays were special even though Christmas was right around the corner. The party was so fun with a clown and cake and songs and wonderful presents from their friends and grandparents and uncle and aunts. It went by so fast but before they knew it, everyone had gone home and it was time to clean up and get ready for bed.

Evening family devotions were one of the most important parts of Lee and Larry’s day. Daddy read part of the story of Jesus coming at Christmas which is where he read every year during December so they would know the real reason for Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Jesus. At the end of it, Lee asked, “Daddy, did Jesus get a birthday party every year with presents and a clown too?”

Everybody laughed trying to imagine what kind of birthday party Mary and Joseph gave for Jesus when He was six. Larry wondered, “I bet he liked the same kind of toys we like.”

“Well, what does God like?” Lee added. “I mean, we like cookies and cartoons and toys, but what kind of things are fun for God?” It was a question that for a minute Mommy and Daddy had to think about.

“I know!” Said Larry. “I bet he likes angels because he has them around all the time. Maybe he and the angels play family games like we do sometimes. Maybe they play Monopoly.” This made Mommy laugh really hard.

“Or maybe he likes bowling.” Lee continued. “I heard someone say that when you hear thunder, that means that God is bowling in heaven. I bet he is really good at it.”

“I bet he is PERFECT at it!” Laughed Larry.

“Well boys,” Mommy finally said after they had come up with lots of silly ideas of what God did for fun, “What God really likes is when people love each other and take care of each other like we do in our family.” That made sense to Lee and Larry so Lee hugged Mommy and Larry hugged daddy to just make God happy.

“You know what Pastor Johansson told us on Sunday is that God really likes worship.” Daddy added.

“You mean like when we sing praise songs in Church?” Larry asked and daddy nodded. “Well I can make up a worship song.” So Larry jumped to his feet and began to make up a song to a very bad tune. “Jesus is so cool. Its fun being with God. He is the funnest God anyone could have.” Larry sang very badly so Lee had put his hands over his ears.

“Singing worship songs is good but that’s not the only way to worship.” Daddy said, maybe to make Larry stop singing. “There are lots of ways to worship.”

‘LIKE WHAT DADDY, TELL US, TELL US.’ Both boys jumped up and down wanting to know how to make God happy.

“Well like Mommy said, when we love each other and love the world that Jesus died for, that’s a kind of worship. When we think about God and listen to the sermon or in Sunday School, that’s a way of worshipping because we are learning how great God is and He likes that. Or when we sit around and tell each other what the greatest things about God are. You know how much you like hearing people say how smart or cute you boys are? Well God likes when we talk together about how great he is.” Daddy answered.

“I know a game we can play that is like Daddy is talking about.” Mommy said making both boys want to know the game a lot. “It’s called ‘What is the best thing about God. And each of us has to come up with one really great thing we like about God. Who wants to go first?’ Lee and Larry jumped and shouted “ME ME!” waving their hands in the air like they do at school. Finally, Mommy said, “Well Lee, since you are two minutes older than Larry, you can go first.”

“Ok,” Lee said and then he stopped and thought. “The best thing about God is hmmm.....” He puzzled because he had so many things that were great about God but he wanted to pick the best one so he would win the game. “That he knows

everything. That's really cool. That means he can help me with my homework." Larry concluded with a proud expression on his face.

"My turn, my turn." Larry said eagerly wiggling to get a chance to talk. "I think the best thing about God is that he can beat up the devil because the devil is scary and mean and ugly and bad and God can beat him up so the devil can't hurt us like he did those demon filled people in Jesus day."

Mommy and Daddy hugged the twins because it was getting time to get to bed. "Mommy thinks the best thing about God is he gave me these two little rascals and they are the best thing in Mommy's world." She said cuddling and tickling both boys. That was the kind of thing mommies always say. The giggled and hugged Mommy and were almost ready to go to their bunk beds when Lee said.

"Daddy you didn't say what the best thing about God is. You have to play too."

"Well, I am surprised you all left the very extra best one for me." Daddy said with a teasing smile. "It's that he sent Jesus to die for us and give us life forever and ever and that because of that we will be a family in heaven for millions of years. That's pretty good isn't it?"

"Daddy wins!" The twins declared.

"This is such a fun game and we had a perfect birthday Daddy." Larry added. "Can we play 'What's the best thing about God' tomorrow too?" he begged his Mommy.

"You can play it anytime you want." Daddy answered. "Because talking about how great God is makes him happy and its worship. Play it before you go to sleep tonight and when you wake up in the morning and God will be close to you all day long.

"WE WILL." They both shouted and they ran to the bedroom bickering about who gets to go first.

44

A Trip on a Comet

Value: The Sabbath Day

"God is going to hear you talking about that Tommy and he won't like it." Steve told his best friend as they were going to school Monday morning.

"Well I don't get it. What is Sunday even good for anyway? I don't get it. We go to church every Sunday but nobody knows why. Maybe it's just a bunch of goofy rules the church made up so why should we do it anyway?" Tommy said in a snotty way. Tommy

really was a good boy. He loved God and his family and all those things but sometimes he just had questions and he wanted someone to tell him the truth. Lots of us are like that.

“Tommy, be careful. If you keep asking those kinds of questions, well God can hear you.” Steve said but Tommy said “fine” and he meant it. He didn’t care if God did hear him. If God wanted to show him why Sunday was important, that would suit Tommy just fine. Tommy thought about it all day at school. As he walked out onto the playground after school, he noticed that all of a sudden, there were not any other kids around.

As he came around the corner to the bicycles racks, he stopped short. He faced the biggest pair of feet he ever saw. They had sandals and they together were so wide, he had to turn his head to see from one toe to the other. Slowly Tommy’s eyes followed up the massive legs to the edge of a huge white robe, on up the big body to a huge beaming face that was all white with a glow like it has a light bulb inside of it. Behind each shoulder, he saw the edges of a huge angel’s wing.

“Hello Tommy, you ready to go?” The angel said with a deep voice that seemed to fill every inch of the air for miles around.

“Who are you?” Tommy asked feeling it was a pretty good question.

“I am Gabriel. I am the chief Angel of God. Are you ready to go find out why there is a Sunday?” Gabriel answered in a kind but firm voice.

“Where are we going?” Tommy wanted to know.

“You will see when we get there.” The angel answered.

“How will we get there?” Tommy continued.

“Well by comet of course. See?” And Gabriel gestured over to the swing sets where he had tied up to the jungle gym a steaming, flaming, very angry comet that didn’t like being tied up and it wanted to go right now.

“Well I.....” Tommy hesitated but he didn’t have time to finish deciding because in a flash he was holding on for dear life. The comet wasn’t tied to the jungle gym any more, it was streaking through space faster than ten rockets with fire and smoke streaming past as Tommy held on to part of the comet and Gabriel’s toe. He suddenly heard himself going “wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” but then he suddenly heard Gabriel going “wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” too. Who knew angels go “wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee”?

Suddenly it seemed like the comet wasn’t moving. Tommy couldn’t see anything but could hear a sound like something out of control below. “Where is everything Gabriel?” Tommy asked.

“Everything hasn’t been created yet.” He said, “Listen” and as Tommy listened, a different voice, a booming and yet endlessly loving voice spoke with more authority than his dad and the principle combined when it said...

“LET THERE BE LIGHT!”.

And so much light exploded, it was like a billion light bulbs. Suddenly things were happening everywhere. He kept hearing that loving voice saying “LET THERE BE...” and more and more stuff happened. Below he saw a huge round thing form when he realized it was a planet and that it was his home, the earth. The sky formed up, really, really fast when that voice told it to and then the stars and the sun and then oceans and plants and plants and animals and then..... and then.....

Then Tommy saw a little space of dust. And that voice said “LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE...” and like some invisible hands were making a model, a shape of a person formed in the dirt and then it was like a complete person with a face and fingers and everything but made all of dirt. Then a breeze came to it but not a regular breeze, it came from that voice and when that breeze hit the dirt guy, he sat up and he was a person.

Suddenly Tommy understood and he turned to Gabriel’s toe and then looked up and he said, “Gabriel is this why we have Sunday? To remember when God created the world?”

“This is why we have the Sabbath, Tommy.” Gabriel said, “Let me show you why we have a Sunday.” And the comet took off but moved like a super fast elevator and suddenly Tommy was standing on a hill. He held on to Gabriel’s toe still but he wasn’t home or on the comet. He looked up at a huge signpost in the ground. But it wasn’t a signpost. It was a beam of wood and as he followed it up into the air, he saw a man, up on that wood, his arms out and he was stretched on a beam across. A beam that was like, well, like,....

“It’s the cross!” Tommy said gasping at what he was seeing. He turned to Gabriel to try to understand what he was seeing but when he did, Gabriel was gone. He turned back and the cross was gone but he saw the jungle gym and the swings and his bike in the bike rack and there stood Steve looking at him funny.

“Tommy, where have you been? You look terrible.” Steve said helping Tommy get his clothes back on right.

“Never mind that. I know why we have a Sunday now Steve.”

“You do? Why?”

“Because of the Cross. Because Jesus died for us on that day and every Sunday we worship him for it and it is a holy day this week and every week for ever and ever and ever.” Tommy said reverently.

“Wow, that must have been some trip. Where did you go?”

“I can’t explain it now Steve.” Tommy said. “But here is a souvenir and I will tell you later” he said handing Steve something and walking to his bike. Steve looked down and opened his hand puzzled and wondered even more as he picked up the tiny piece of comet chip and put it in his pocket for later.

45

A Swear Word in Heaven

Value: Foul Language is bad.

In heaven, running and playing was what all the children are supposed to do. Ever since Jesus came and got them, Georgie and his family were blissfully happy in heaven. And for Georgie, there was so many things to see and do and you never had to be afraid or come in after dark or worry about getting hurt or bad people because you can’t be hurt or get sick or meet any bad people in heave because heaven is full of people that love Jesus just like he did. So if he ran screaming in joy through the streets, nobody complained and in fact, the angels and Jesus himself might run into the street and play kickball with him. That is just the kind of place heaven is.

One day Georgie was trying to figure out how old he was. Since there is no getting older or days or months in heaven, he might be a bazillion years old for all he knew. He never worried about it but he was playing with little diamonds that he collected from the streets and using them to count. That’s when he saw it. It was not like anything he had ever seen in heaven. It was very small, maybe a foot high and wide. It didn’t have a head, no wait, in fact, it only had a head. It was just one little round hairy ball in the middle, with ears on the side, no arms, two very thin and scrawny crow like legs sticking out and these two HUGE feet, bigger than ducks feet which is picked up and flopped down with a PLOP PLOP PLOP as it walked down the middle of the street in heaven.

“What is that thing?” Georgie’s sister asked and Georgie sure didn’t know. Just then, his daddy stepped behind the children and pulled them back.

“It’s a swear word.” He said solemnly.

“A swear word?” Georgie said puzzled. “In heaven? How can that be, how did it get in here?”

PLOP PLOP PLOP the swear word in heaven just kept plodding along making slow and stead progress. Behind him, his footprints were green and yucky and smelled bad. Every so often, it stopped and shook and suddenly a big belch of fowl brown smoke oozed out of it and everyone on the street just went “Ewwwwwww”.

All of God's people were very unhappy about the swear word in heaven and that was bad because nobody was ever supposed to be unhappy in heaven. Everybody knew that nobody knew what to do about it. Georgie ran to the one who always made him feel better. He ran to Jesus. Jesus was sitting on a park bench teaching about 30 people about what it was really like the day he gave his life for their sins so they could be in heaven when Georgie ran up and sat right at his feet. It was ok. In heaven, you can hug God anytime you need a hug. He likes it. But as Georgie was holding Jesus by the ankles, they all heard it.

PLOP PLOP PLOP. The swear word in heave was coming. They heard it before they smelled it but when they smelled it, they remembered why swear word always were so yucky. It rounded the corner and one plop after the other walked up to about five feet in front of Jesus and it stopped.

"Do you know who I am?" The swear word said to Jesus.

"Yes, you are a swear word. I know all about you. I have cleaned you up before." Jesus answered.

"Well here I am in heaven. And I am going to ruin it for everyone." It said with a nasty laugh.

"No you won't. I know that because I know why you are a swear word and not a praise word." Jesus said with a soft sternness in his voice.

"Nobody knows that. If they did, nobody would let a swear word in heaven, in their houses or anywhere where people are." The swear word said with a small billow of that awful smoke oozing up.

"There is a door in your tummy, open it." Jesus commanded and Georgie looked closely. Sure enough, there was a tiny door in the middle of his fat round body, which was really all there was to him, with tiny little hinges and a handle with no lock. Slowly the swear word, raised his huge foot so it flipped the handle and the door swung open. A gasp went through the people of God at what they saw. They saw nothing. The swear word in heave was empty inside. "That's why you swear isn't it? Because you are empty inside and you want people to think you are something so instead of blessing them and loving them, you are a swear word which only pushes people away."

"So what?" The swear word said defiantly. "Nobody can fix my emptiness." A gasp went up because everybody knew that everybody knew who could fix the emptiness inside of an empty soul. Jesus smiled and from his eyes came that glow that became a light beam of pure love that poured from his divine heart, out his eyes, passed Georgie who stuck his finger in it, just for a little sample and then it poured into the open door of the heart of that empty place in the creature. Just like that the swear word in heaven burst with light that drove all the awful smoke from the air. The hole inside him filled to

overflowing with the sweet water of life that every occupant of heaven drank of every single day.

“What happened?” It said with a confused but joyful song in its voice. “What am I now?”

“You are no longer a swear word in heaven.” Jesus pronounced. “You are now a praise word in heaven and here is your family. Rushing down the hills were not three, not seven, not thirty-eight but millions, no zillions, no bazillions of happy glowing praise words that overran heaven every single day. They rushed to their new brother and hugged him with their feet and giggled and the song of praise words that went up carried all of heaven into a concert of praise that lasted for centuries. Georgie watched the joyful celebration of a saved praise word, he still hugged Jesus’ feet and together they watched the happy thing make its way to its new home in heaven where it will never be alone, never lonely, never bored and always full of happiness, joy and fun because in heaven, a praise word is always loved by everyone.

“He will be all right now Georgie,” Jesus told him.

“I know Jesus but one thing I can’t help but notice.” Georgie answered.

“What’s that?”

“It still has awfully big feet.” Georgie answered, and then he ran off to laugh and play some more.

46

Smudge and Snuggles Find a Statue

Value: We should have no other Gods before the true God

Smudge and his sister Snuggles were not very much different from all the young chipmunks in the forest. They loved their mommy and daddy and the time they spent together in the rafters of the church worshiping God with the people, even though the people didn’t know they were up there. You probably have a few chipmunks worshipping in your church with you that nobody knows about. Look for them this Sunday. You will see them.

But the thing they loved to do, like all children of all species love to do is play. Oh, they ran all over the forest, leaping from tree to tree, playing "chase me, catch me" not always knowing who was doing the chasing and who the catching. The forest was so fun to explore and they found lots of treats to nibble on and left over toys from humans who had visited the forest.

One day they played “chase me, catch me” so hard that they ran far out of their usual play areas in the forest. Suddenly they perched on an old stump and looked around puzzled.

“Where is this place Smudge?” Snuggles asked her brother.

“I am not sure. This is a different part of the forest. Look at all the old pillars and slabs. It looks like there was some kind of building here, like a church or something.” Smudge answered.

“A church? Maybe it’s like the one we sneak into and worship Jesus with the humans in town. Wouldn’t that be exciting? Let’s explore” Snuggles squeaked excitedly. And explore they did. They burrowed under leaves and sticks finding interesting colored stones and pieces of paper with squiggles on them like the books that the humans sing from in church. Just then, Snuggles sang out with great excitement. “LOOK WHAT I FOUND SMUDGE!”

Smudge leapt from rock to rock until he reached his sister and when he saw it, he just gasped. “It’s a statue!” He exclaimed.

And it was a statue. It was about the same size as the chipmunks but it wasn’t like the statues at their regular church. The little man statue was fat and his face looked different, like pictures of oriental people they saw in the children’s picture books they spied on after Sunday School. The little fat man didn’t have a shirt on and he was sitting cross-legged. His hands rested on his knees with the palms up and one finger touching the thumb and he was smiling with his eyes closed. “It looks like he is praying” Smudge observed.

“If this is a church, maybe this is the god that they worshipped, like we have statues of Jesus at the human church.” Snuggles thought.

“Maybe that’s it!” Smudge said as he tried to understand. “We better worship it!” So the little chipmunks tried to make up worship songs for the statue. They sang....”

“YOU ARE THE BEST STATUE GOD IN THE FOREST” but that one didn’t have very good tune.

“FAT MAN STATUES LOVE US, THIS WE KNOW...” but the statue didn’t seem to love them very much.

“Snuggles, why don’t I feel peace and joy inside like when we worship Jesus?” Smudge wondered.

“I know why” Snuggles said with alarm jumping back from the statue. “Remember Pastor Jones preached about the idols the bad religions worshiped in the old part of their religion book? I think this is an idol Snuggles!”

“And God said in those 10 rules Moses got from the mountain, ‘I am the LORD your God, You shall have no other gods before me’” said Snuggles with alarm in her chipmunk voice. “Oh Smudge, we shouldn’t be worshipping this fat man statue at all.”

“I don’t feel joy and peace at all right now Snuggles. In fact, I have a tummy ache,” Smudge complained. Just then, a big black cloud formed over the forest, thunder boomed making Smudge and Snuggles jump with fright and it began to storm.

“Let’s run home!” Smudge screamed in fear.

The two little chipmunks never ran so fast. Over the rocks and fallen trees, past bushes and all the other animals they knew until they found the forest where they felt safe and then straight home and to their hutch in the chipmunk home they shared with mommy and daddy. There they felt safe and promised each other they would never go to that part of the forest again. And they were so glad tomorrow was Sunday so they could go worship the one true God like they were supposed to do.

47

Merlin’s Magic Words

Value: The Name of Jesus

Jonathan and Gwen were the best of friends. They grew up next door neighbors and from the moment they could listen, they heard stories of the great King Arthur, his valiant knights of the round table, the beautiful princesses and the terrifying dragons and of course the amazing and mysterious Merlin. How often they whispered to each other that they wished just one of these mythical people who were the rulers of their kingdom would happen by to see them in their tiny village.

“Do you think there are dragons in our forests or caves?” Gwen asked her friend curiously.

“Oh yes, there must be and when we are grown, I will fight them and King Arthur will make me a knight of the round table.” Jonathan bragged beating on his chest until he had to stop because it made him cough. The two walked along the path that lead to church talking about all these wonderful heroes and adventures that they wished they could be part of. Up ahead they saw the tiny hut which was the church for their village and they couldn’t help but look to the sky at the tall cross Jonathan’s daddy had carved and put there to honor Jesus.

“I wish I could see Merlin do his magic.” Jonathan continued.

“Oh me too Jonathan” Gwen said with a sigh. It was not a sigh of unhappiness because she was so content in her little village. She loved her parents and had wonderful friends like Jonathan and they felt safe far from the wars that the king and his knights conducted to protect their homeland. But still, children long for adventure, even if they are afraid sometimes.

“I wish I could clap my hands like this...” and he clapped loudly CLAP CLAP, “and Merlin would come and teach us his magic.”

“Hee hee hee,” Gwen giggled, “Yes we could both clap...” and she mimicked her friend with her more dainty claps CLAP CLAP “and he would come make us wizards too.

“You are very good at clapping Sir Knight and Princess Gwen” the deep rumbling voice came from just off the path. Gwen and Jonathan almost jumped out of their hair at the voice. They landed on the other side of the path looking for the voice. There sitting on a stump next to the church was what could only be a wizard. His long robe reached his sandaled feet. His white hair was long as was his pointed beard and his staff was tall and crooked at the end and singed at the tip as though much fire had come from it. And his robe was covered with mythical and colorful symbols like stars and moons and mysterious runes that the children could not know.

“Why did you call me Sir Knight?” Jonathan asked shyly. “I am just a little boy.”

“Yes good Jonathan.” The kindly grandfatherly figure said with a smile. “Come close children, I am Merlin, you called for me. I come to give you the most powerful word in the universe.” Gwen and Jonathan were drawn to the feet of the wizard. “You see yourself as a child Jonathan. But Merlin can see beyond today to a world only a few years away. I can see for who you will become. For buried inside of you is the greatness you will grow in to. And inside this little boy Jonathan is a wonderful Knight who will serve his king and his Lord Jesus mightily not so many years from now.”

“But how can you see us as we will be?” Gwen asked gazing wide eyed as the magical man.

“Because I see you as God sees you, Princess Gwen.” Merlin explained. “I see you for what God created you to be and a princess and a mighty knight you will be, if you serve Jesus every day as you grow up.” The children smiled and blushed getting goose bumps thinking of themselves as God sees them.

“But did you say you were going to give us the most powerful magic ever?” Jonathan said with a voice full of wonder and excitement.

“Yes but first some lesser magic.” The wizard said with a wry grin. At that, he lifted his staff to the sky, exclaimed words the children could not understand and his clenched fist sprang open and sparks and tiny fires burst on the stones of the path in front of the children. Jonathan laughed and clapped and the sage wizard smiled with pleasure at their giggles.

“DO MORE, DO MORE!” The children pleaded.

“I will gladly,” Merlin said clearly having as much fun as the children. “Observe that dog, you know him, all the villagers know him. His name is Buster” Merlin said gesturing to the fluffy dog that was prancing down the path toward the church where he often got fed by the priests. “Watch him walk like a human.” Merlin said in a powerful magician voice. He clapped again and just as though a spell changed Buster into a person, the dog rose up on his hind legs and walked several steps. Merlin clapped again and Buster ran behind him.

The children clapped and giggled seeing the magical Merlin for real doing real magic for them. “Please teach us to be wizards. Teach us the deepest secrets.” They said with happy nagging in their voices.

“All right but you must promise when I teach you the most powerful word in the universe, you will hold it dear in your heart.” The wizard warned them and they jumped and leapt about like silly children, which they were, and promised and promised and promised. Then Merlin made them sit at his feet and whispered to them.

“The deep dark secret is this children...” he said gazing into their trusting eyes. “The tricks you saw are not magic at all. Anyone can do them.” And at that, he opened his hand to show them some tiny white crystals. “These are sulfur crystals. They easily burst into flames and they are how I made the ‘magic’ flames appear.”

“But what about Buster?” Gwen objected. “You made him walk.”

“Princess Gwen, the secret of magic is there is no source of power in the universe except that which comes from God. You will be powerful in your knowledge of spiritual power when you learn the word at which every knee shall bow and every spiritual being, demon and angel kneel and worship. Now watch.” And he whistled and buster came to him. He held his hand above the happy dog and opened it showing he had a treat which buster was begging for. Merlin dropped the treat in his mouth after Buster danced on his toes giving a show that made the children laugh and clap all over again. “When Buster walked for us earlier, he ran behind me to get his treat.” Merlin explained.

“See children, these are harmless tricks but there is no spiritual power that can do mighty works except those which God can do. And that is the powerful word you will now know. This word gives God’s children the power to do powerful things in His name. Just listen to the holy words about this amazing word.” And Merlin produced a big black book from his satchel.

“I wonder if that is the book of spells.” Jonathan whispered but then Merlin read.

“They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” He read and the children just gasp with awe at the power of the word.

“Tell us the word, Merlin. Please, please, please, please., please.” The children begged and then he turned the pages of the book. As he lifted the book to read it, Gwen made out the title. It was “The Holy Bible” and then Merlin read.

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;” and then he closed the book. “The name of Jesus is the most powerful word in the universe Children. With it we can heal the sick, cast out evil and become friends with God. And being a friend with God is even better than meeting King Arthur, isn’t it children.

“Yes Merlin” the children answered in awe.

“But what can we do, Merlin?” Jonathan said confused. “We are just children.”

“Obey Jesus, Children.” Merlin instructed. “Go to church and Sunday School every week. That is where you will learn how to use the name of Jesus. Pray and ask your parents and teachers and pastor to teach you everything about God and Jesus and the Bible and you will become powerful servants able to do mighty works, in the name of children. And it can all start today, just inside this tiny church. That is where the power is Sir Knight and Princess Gwen. Do you want it?”

“YES” and they ran to the church door and pulled it open. Just before they went in Gwen stopped.

“Wait we forgot to thank him.” And they both looked back. But the powerful wizard was not gone. All that remained was the a whirling smoke that curled around the stump where he sat and Buster was dancing and barking happily on his hind legs like a human.

48

Is it Sin if You Didn’t Know?

Value: Thou Shalt not Steal

Susan and Janie and Heather loved to go to the mall. If they had a little money to spend, that was extra fun but even if they didn’t they loved to just look at things and get treats at the food court and meet friends from school and church and just be kids for a while. Susan’s mother felt sure the mall was safe because the girls were together and had good common sense and several members of their church worked at the mall and the food court so they kept an eye on the girls, even though the girls didn’t know that.

This Saturday was like all the others as Susan waited for Janie and Heather to get to her house for mom to drive them to the mall. She fussed with her make up and hair trying different styles and thinking of how the kids in school would react to a different color. Finally, they got here and everybody in the house scattered as the girls had their reunion

in the front all with all the necessary giggling and gossiping and telling each other how cute they looked in their outfits.

“Mom are you ready to go?” Susan called up the stairs. “Janie and Heather are here.”

“Just a minute honey.” Susan’s mom yelled down and finally she came down all ready to go but she had Susan’s little brother Timmy tagging along with her. “Susan, be a dear and let Timmy tag along with you girls. Mrs. Henderson next door is sick so he can’t go over there.”

At first, Susan pouted and made a fuss because she was afraid Timmy would be a bother. “Susan let him come. We love Timmy. He is so funny and cute and we will help you watch him so he doesn’t wander off.” Janie whispered to her friend.

“Yes do Susan” Heather chimed in “You know all the kids love Timmy when he comes and sits in on Sunday School when your dad teaches.”

So Susan agreed and they all had a big time tickling Timmy in the car and getting him to laugh and making him everybody’s cute little brother, not just Susan’s. At the mall, the four had a wonderful time together. Instead of being a bother, Timmy learned how to make his sister and her friends laugh with his silly faces or things he would say making fun of the clothes or the people at the mall walking around. “He’s so funny Susan, we just love him.” Heather said once laughing at his antics so hard that she almost fell down. The afternoon passed quickly and before they knew it, mom had picked them up and they were on the way home for a sleepover.

The girls got busy getting Susan’s room ready for a night of watching chick flicks and doing all the fun things that a sleepover had to have. There was plenty of popcorn and ice cream and make up to do each other over with and they were talking and trying to decide what movies to watch. Suddenly the air was filled with loud sobs.

“Susan!” She heard her sweet little brother cry out from his room down the hall. All three girls ran in. There on his bed sat Timmy cross-legged. He had spread on his blanket some of the toys he had bought at the mall but he was holding a big candy bar and just sobbing. Susan loved Timmy tons and didn’t want him to cry so she sat on the bed and held him and Heather and Janie patted him and comforted him.

“What is it Timmy, did someone hurt you?” Susan gently asked him as he calmed down enough to talk.

“No, look!” and he opened his hand which was wrapped around a very large candy bar. “I don’t think I paid for this Susan. I know I had it in my hand at that candy booth in the food court. But Heather called for me to come look at the movie posters and I just ran to her with it in my hand and put it in my bag without thinking. I stole it Susan.” He sobbed. “God is going to hate me, won’t he? I did a terrible sin.”

“Susan, remember Pastor Smith’s sermon last week on ‘Thou Shalt Not Steal?’” Janie asked. “I know all of us including Timmy went to the altar and promised God we never would steal. What’s going to happen Susan? Will Timmy go to hell for stealing now?” Janie asked her friend and she was near tears at the idea of Timmy being in so much trouble with God.”

“I don’t know” Susan exclaimed nearing tears herself holding Timmy tight.

All of the children were about to break down in tears when Heather finally said, “Wait let’s ask your mom.” She ran to the door, out into the hall and called down to Susan’s mom. “Mrs. Morris, please come help!” Her voice was so full of panic that Susan’s mom came rushing up the stairs expecting to find someone bleeding. She found the girls and Timmy sobbing in Timmy’s room.

“Timmy, Susan, what’s wrong? Are you sick?” Their mom said warmly but a little scared touching each of their heads for a temperature like all moms do.

“No its worse. I think Timmy is doomed.” Susan cried. “See when we went to the mall...” and between all four of them Mrs. Morris figured out what the problem was. Suddenly just laughed out loud like she had heard the funniest joke ever.

“Why are you laughing mom? I don’t want Timmy to go to hell.” Susan objected.

“Kids listen to me. Timmy, did you intend to steal the candy?” She asked holding Timmy’s hand. Heather and Janie sat cross-legged on the floor listening.

“No Mommy, I didn’t even know I did it. Is that sin Mommy? Is it sin if you didn’t know?” He asked desperate to know if he was in bad trouble with God.

“Kids remember our Sunday School lesson about sin? Remember what sin is?” She asked.

“I remember Mrs. Morris.” Said Janie. “Sin is anything that keeps us from loving God.”

“That’s right Janie. Timmy, sin is something that comes out of your heart when it wants to rebel against God. It is something you decide to do when you know you shouldn’t. If you had found the candy in your bag and not cried and not told anyone and kept it or ate it knowing you had not paid for it, then you would have stolen it and you would be in sin.

“Then I am not doomed, Mommy?” Timmy said trying to feel relieved.

“You are sensitive to what God wants, Timmy. Girls you are too, that’s why you cried so much. That’s good. It hurts your heart to think of someone you love going to hell. That’s how God feels and that is why Jesus came and died for our sins. Let’s pray that God take all of our sins out of our hearts.” And they all bowed their heads and prayed and when they looked up, instead of tears, there were pretty smiles on all their faces.

“But what about the candy bar, Mom?” Susan wanted to know.

“Tell you what, Timmy. Let’s let the girls get their sleepover going. You and I will run over to the mall, tell the man what happened and you can pay for the candy bar with your allowance money and everything will be right again.”

“Will it really Mommy?” Timmy said with excitement “Will it make it like I never did the bad thing.”

“It will be better than that because the man will know you are an honest boy and he will trust you even more. Better than that, while we are there, let’s get candy bars for all of us and we can join the party, ok?”

HOORAY! All the children leapt with glee and danced around hugging and kissing Mrs. Morris for being so wise.

49

Cartoon Dreams

Value: Is Idolatry Bad?

Kimberly loved cartoons. It was a pretty big hobby before but when mom and dad let her have a TV in her room, she really started loving cartoons even more. She loved the old ones a lot like Bugs Bunny, The Roadrunner, Popeye and lots of new ones too. Recently the one she liked best was Roscoe Rabbit. On Saturday nights, they play three hours of Roscoe Rabbit in a row. So Kimberly goes to bed early to curl up for a long fun evening of watching cartoons.

As half hour episode after half hour episode drifted by, Kimberly thought she felt herself drifting off to sleep. She really couldn’t tell the difference between sleep and being awake. Suddenly she woke up feeling a strange shaking sound and a high squeaky voice saying, “Kimberley, Kimberley, wake up, we have a long way to go and a lot to do.”

She felt herself come away slowly and suddenly bolting up staring right into that strange face. “Who are you?” she shouted although she recognized him right away.

“Well, I’m Roscoe Rabbit of course, come on, we have to travel three dozen galaxies to get to Moonblind where you will live forever”

“What do you mean forever?” But before she could get an answer, his white gloved hand closed on hers and they shot out in space like two Fourth of July rockets out into the cosmos and past the sun. Kimberly felt herself changed into just a blur of cartoon steam as she rocketed past stars and planets and comets sometimes doing squiggly patterns and loop-de-loops in space and then THUNK she was standing on a completely cartooned world, holding hands with the cartoon Roscoe Rabbit who was twice as big as her.

“Well, here we are? What do you want to do first?” Roscoe said in that goofy cartoon voice of his.

“I want to go home. How did I get here?”

“Wait, here comes the Bosco Boys!” Roscoe said with a wild giggle and in a flash from horizon to horizon was filled with every size, assortment, species and gender of alien motorcycle riders heads down and racing along at ridiculous speeds right toward them. Before Kimberly could yell, “HELP” she was swept up and holding for dear life to a huge pink and green hairy cartoon animal that kept doing wheelies with his motorcycle.

“Hang on Kimberly, we are going to ZIMZIM CITY” You are going to meet the GRAND ZIMZIM!!” Roscoe yelled as his hat blew from his head and he almost toppled form behind a yellow skeleton with big floppy feet racing his motorcycle with his skinny Skelton bottom shoved high up in the air. When the thousands of motorcyclists hit the gates of ZIMZIP CITY, they suddenly merged into a cycle of cartoon creatures all mixing together into one out of control mess when they were suddenly shot out and landed in a huge room in front of a throne high above them.

Turning to Roscoe Rabbit, Kimberly had to know “Is the GRAND ZIMZIM the president or something?” Suddenly Roscoe slammed to the floor and became flat as a pancake with his long cartoon rabbit arms stretched out before him. His totally flap lips moved when he said “Bow down, Kimberly, the GRAND ZIMZIM is our God!!!”

ALL BOW said another voice that came from a smallish purple cartoon duck with yellow spots. Then it came in, what had to be the GRAND ZIMZIM. The thing that walked in looked somewhat like a cross between an alligator and a petunia. It sat on the throne looking very pleased with itself, until it saw Kimberly.

“You are not bowed down? You better get with it. Cartoon land works badly when someone disobeys. I am the God in this cartoon you know.”

“I am NOT going to bow because first, I am not a cartoon and second, I already have a god and I don’t worship anybody else.”

“Well, “the GRAND ZIMZIM said beginning to pout. “Why not?”

“Well because in the real world there is only one God and we only worship him.” Kimberly insisted.

“Oh please, juts a little worship.”

“NO” Kimberly said and she stomped her feet.

“Ok then, you have a right to your choices, but the penalty for not worshipping the GRAND ZIMZIM is to be dangled above the huge worm tank!!”

There was a cartoon flash and Kimberly first felt her arms over her head, bound by cartoon ropes. “Well I hope your satisfied NOW” she heard to her right where she found Roscoe Rabbit dangling and wiggling above a tank of very nasty multi-colored worms. “All this because YOU couldn’t FOR JUST FIVE MINUTES worship the GREAT ZIMZIM!!!”

“OHYEAH!” Kimberly shouted loosing her temper. “WELL I AM NEVER WATCHING YOUR SHOW AGAIN!” but before the words were completely out, the ropes let go. Kimberly felt herself screaming and falling and falling and falling and.....

‘EEK” she sat straight up in her bed. It was morning and the cartoon channel was selling exercise equipment to her. The first thing Kimberly saw was not all the cartoon posters and toys but in the corner a sweet picture of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She ran to that picture and hugged it crying. “Jesus, I’m sorry I loved cartoons more than you” and she was too. Because before the weekend was over the posters were gone and mom and dad happily took TV from her room and Kimberly knew for certain why she should never consider worshiping another god who is not the one true God again.

50

The Good Little Snake Value: The story of the Fall

Everything was just fine for Stanley in the Garden of Eden. He was a harmless little snake and just like all the other animal children, he just wanted to play with the mongoose and the lambs and the turtles and the mice. See in the Garden of Eden, none of the animals were enemies so they all played together all day long. That is how it will be in heaven too.

Stanley loved foot races with the Cheetah. Oh, I forgot to mention that snakes had legs and feet in the Garden of Eden too. Well, everything was peaceful and fun and loving in the garden until one day, all of a sudden, the garden became very dark. The animals scurried about to try to figure out what was going wrong.

“What is it?” Stanley pleaded with his best friend Morris the Mongoose.

“Something is wrong with the Garden.” Morris cried out.

“But we should find Adam. He will know what to do.” Stanley said trying to calm his friend.

“That’s just the problem.” Morris yelled as they ran. “Adam and Eve caused the trouble.”

They joined the throng of animals all rushing to the center of the garden, the great tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Suddenly they stopped as the ridge that surrounded the center of the garden where God always walked and played with his humans was filled with animals. There stood God, majestic and awesome as always. Before him stood Adam and on her knees behind Adam was Eve and she was weeping, something nobody had ever seen before since there never was any sorrow in the perfect garden. Then off a ways was a very strange beast. It was a snake but not a sweet snake like Stanley and his brothers and cousins. This snake was huge, swelled up like he was full of bad things and he was hissing and snorting like he had been angry since the dawn of time.

“Do you know him Stanley?” Doris the Dove said landing on Stanley’s head.

“No.” Stanley said. “He isn’t like any snake I ever saw. He isn’t sweet and full of games and love like most snakes.”

“That’s because he isn’t a snake at all.” A voice came from behind. Everyone turned and saw Henrietta the Hummingbird flitting from head to head. “A few minutes ago, all of us Hummingbirds flew down there to find out what is going on. That’s no snake, Stanley. That is God’s enemy. They call him Satan and he has done a terrible thing.”

All of a sudden, there was a terrible earthquake and everybody was thrown every which way. Stanley screamed trying to stay close to his friends but it was no use. Things were falling and it was all he could do to tell which was up and which was down. Chaos rained down for what seemed like days and then all of a sudden, it was still. Stanley stared up at the sky. Suddenly Henrietta appeared. “You ok Stanley?”

“Yes, I think so Henrietta.” He said rolling over. Then he noticed something terrible. His legs were gone. “Hey no I’m not. Somebody stole my legs.”

“They weren’t stolen Stanley.” The little bird explained. “God passed judgment on the great evil snake because he brought sin into the garden.”

“Well that’s not my fault!” Stanley complained. “Why should I suffer because someone else did wrong?”

“Everybody is suffering, Stanley.” She continued. “Look around you, the garden is gone. See over there. That fierce angel with the fiery sword is standing guard over it. Nobody can go back. The earth and the people are fallen because Adam and Eve did the one thing they were not supposed to do.”

“What could they do that was so bad?” Stanley wondered. “They kept the garden nice and made sure we all had names and played with us every day. Wait, they didn’t,” he gasped.

“Yes, they ate the apple they were told not to eat. It was the only rule and they broke it. And now not only are they cursed, they brought the curse on all of us.” So he learned to crawl without his legs right over to Adam and Eve.

“Look at me.” He said to them. “My beautiful legs are gone. I look stupid like this. What are we going to do? Is there any hope for us?” He pleaded with the two very sorry humans. Finally, Adam turned and looked into Stanley’s eyes and smiled and touched his head. There was love in his eyes, and hope.

“I know you are sad. We all are Stanley.” Adam said to the little snake. “But God will not leave us to perish. He loves us too much for that. Before we were punished, he gave a promise that some day, he own son will come to earth and make it all like it was before. He will defeat the evil snake, Satan and defeat death and make everything perfect again.”

“He will?” Stanley said almost crying in happiness at that news. “Maybe then I will get my legs back.”

“Don’t worry Stanley.” Eve said picking him up so he could slither around her fingers. “You look cute like this and we will all take care of each other until the Son of God comes and fixes it.

“I promise to take care of you too, and Henrietta and Morris and all my friends.” He promised and when she put him down, he coiled around her toes. He was still sad but now he had salvation to hope for. And besides, he kind of liked being cute without his snake legs. At least for a little while.
