

“LET THE CHILDREN COME”

**52 CHILDREN’S MESSAGES
A RESOURCE FOR WORSHIP LEADERS AND CHURCH
SCHOOL TEACHERS**

Wilbert M. Van Dyk

In memory of

Elaine – (1931-2009)

love of my life, mother of our five, companion in ministry

Special Thanks

- to my daughter Susanne Jordan for her careful reading of and helpful comments on the first draft of this material;
- to those who were members of Plymouth Heights Church between 1964 and 1986 who might recognize occasional themes from my ministry among them;
- to the skeptics who raised an eye-brow at the thought of a retired minister writing a collection of children's messages but who still encouraged me to continue the project. "Who knows," they wondered, "Something good may come of it." I hope they were right.

wmvd

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Introduction

In churches it is sometimes called a “Children’s Sermon.” Preschool and early elementary teachers may call them “Morning Devotions.” Christian parents may think of them as mealtime or bedtime prayers.

By whatever name they are known these are precious moments for nurturing and encouraging the faith of children in the early stage of their walk with God. These messages must, therefore, be shaped by what the Bible says about of God and his redeeming love in Christ.

The Children’s Messages/Devotionals in this collection are meant for children age three to third grade, although “children of all ages” may delight in overhearing a message for the younger ones.

In language, concept, and imagination suitable to young children these messages are designed to bring children into the presence of God, his word, and his world.

Wilbert M. Van Dyk
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SECTION ONE
CHILDREN'S MESSAGES
FOR THE
SPECIAL DAYS OF THE YEAR FROM
NEW YEAR'S DAY TO CHRISTMAS

WINKLE AND WADDLE
(New Year's Day)

Winkle and his good friend Waddle were hanging out in front of the Pee-Wee Café. It was the afternoon of New Year's Day and most people were home watching a football game on TV. Winkle and Waddle had said "Happy New Year" to each other and now they were talking about what they did last night on New Year's Eve when lots of people get together to stay up extra late. Waddle said that he had gone to a party with some of his friends. Winkle said that he had not felt very well and decided to stay home and go to bed.

They sat quietly for a little while, swinging their legs on the bench outside of the Pee-Wee Café. Finally Winkle said, "Last week my friend Perkins said that on New Year's Day we are supposed to make a resolution. He said that everybody makes a resolution on New Year's Day." Waddle said, "What's a resolution? I don't like big words."

"Well Perkins said that a resolution is like a promise that you make to yourself to do something better. Like you ought to make a resolution not to eat so much because you are too fat."

"And you" said Waddle, "You ought to make a resolution to be on time for once. You are always coming late for everything."

They thought about that for a little while, and finally Waddle said, "I think we ought to make a resolution to be nice. We ought to make a resolution to be pullers rather than pushers. You," he said to Winkle, "You are always pushing, always shoving people. Remember that girl that you pushed in the park, and she fell, and she broke her arm? You have to make a resolution to stop being a pusher."

"And you," said Winkle, "You have to make a resolution to stop calling people names, stop finding fault with them, stop pushing them down."

So that's what they did. Right there in front of the Pee-Wee Café they made a resolution to be pullers rather than pushers, to pull people up rather than push them down, to help them rather than hurt them.

I don't know whether Jesus ever made a New Year's resolution, but in his love he pulls us to himself where he invites us to make the best resolution ever. "Come," he says, "Follow me."

ASH WEDNESDAY

When you get home after church ask your mother or father to show the days of next week on their smartphone. Look at this coming Wednesday. Under the number of the day you might see the words “Ash Wednesday” because next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. You know what a Wednesday is, but what is an Ash Wednesday?

Well, if your home has a fireplace or you once had a campfire, after the fire burned and the flames went out there was some dirty looking gray stuff where the logs had been. That stuff is called “ash.”

Ashes are an important part of some Bible stories. When people were really sad, or if they were really sorry they would sometimes take a handful of ashes and put them on their head. Sometimes they would just throw the ashes in the air and let them fall on their head and shoulders. They did that as a sign that they were really, really sorry or very, very sad.

In some churches people will go to church on Ash Wednesday. Some ministers will take some ashes on their fingers and put them on the forehead of the person. The minister will make a little cross like the cross on which Jesus died.

Why do they do that? Why are they sad? And why are they sorry? Well between now and Easter Sunday we think in special ways about how wicked people beat Jesus with sticks and spit at him and they nailed him to a cross where he died. And that makes us very sad.

And we are not only sad because of what wicked people did to Jesus, but we are also sad because sometimes we do wrong things that make our hearts feel dirty and we don't love Jesus very much. But Jesus says, “I love you anyway, and I took into my heart all the nasty and naughty things that make your heart feel dirty. And because I did that, your heart will become clean when you love me enough to tell me that you are truly sorry and will try to do better.”

And that's the kind of thing that we think about on Ash Wednesday. We are sad to think of how Jesus suffered. We are sorry for the wrong things that we do. But we are also so glad that on Easter Sunday morning Jesus came out of the grave and that he lives in heaven today where he still loves all the children of the world.

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST VALENTINE'S DAY CARD

This week is Valentine's Day. You know, of course, that Valentine's Day is a special day to say "I love you." We say "I love you" in all kinds of ways. Maybe your father will say "I love you" to your mother with a box of candy, or maybe with some flowers. Lots of people say it with a Valentine's Day card. A very special way to say "I love you" is when children make their own card to say "I love you" to their mother and father. In many homes that kind of card ends up with a magnet on the refrigerator.

But why do we call it Valentine's Day? Why not call it Love Day? It all goes back about one thousand eight hundred years. Across the ocean in a country called Italy, in a city called Rome, there lived a man whose name was Valentine. Valentine's Day is named after him.

So who was Valentine and what did he do that was so important? The problem is that we know where he lived and when he lived, but we don't know anything else about him. Some people said that he was a bad man, but others said he was a wonderful Christian. And that's the kind of story about Valentine that I like.

The story goes like this. When Valentine lived in Rome there were hardly any churches and not many Christians. That was because the police said, "Everybody has to worship the king." And the Christians said, "No, we love Jesus and we shall worship God." So Christians were arrested, put in jail, and sometimes even killed. It was a hard time to be a Christian in Rome. But before he became a Christian Valentine saw what was happening, and he decided to do something about it. He secretly invited Christians to come into his home. He hid them, maybe in the attic, or the basement, or in a secret closet. He gave them food and water. He took care of them. When he saw how kind and brave the Christians were, he became a Christian too and joined them in loving God and loving each other. And that's the story that I like best about how Valentine's Day got started.

Long before Mr. Valentine lived God gave the whole world the biggest Valentine's Day card ever. He gave us the Bible, which is really God's great love letter to us.

THE GRAVY SONG (Easter)

Happy Easter, everybody. I'm sure that some of you are kind of excited about this day. Maybe you have something special planned with your family. But I want to tell you about another church where the church school children were excited about Easter. Some of them had been on an Easter egg hunt on Saturday. Several of them had Easter baskets with chocolate bunnies and colored candy in the shape of eggs. One first grade boy said that he had already eaten the ears off of his chocolate rabbit. So there was lots of excited talk.

But the teacher finally said, "Let's get started. Does somebody have a special song they would like us to sing?" Third grade Stevie raised his hand and said, "I wanna sing the gravy song."

"The gravy song," said the teacher. "I don't think I know that one. How does it go?" "Everybody knows the gravy song," said Stevie. "That's the one that begins with everybody singing slowly and soft, 'Low in the gravy - lay. And then everybody sings real loud, 'Up from the gravy - rose.' You know the gravy song."

Some of the older ones laughed. But the teacher said, "Oh now I know. That's a really good song. But it is not about gravy like you put on meat and potatoes. It helps to put a name in there. Like this: 'Low in the grave Jesus lay.' And then, 'Up from the grave Jesus arose.'"

And that is the great story of Easter. Jesus died on the cross on Friday. Some of his friends carefully put him into a grave that was called a tomb. And then early Sunday morning some women went to visit the grave. But Jesus was gone. An angel said to them, "He is not here. He has risen."

I think it is a pretty great that "up from the grave Jesus arose." If he would have stayed dead he really could not help us very much. But because Jesus lives in heaven now he is able to listen to us when we pray and watch over us when we play.

But now let's sing Stevie's favorite Easter song: "Up from the grave he arose."

THE FAMILY TREE (Mother's Day)

Today is Mother's Day. You knew that, of course. So I hope you were extra nice to your mother this morning because this is her special day. You probably also know that next month is Father's Day and then you will have to be extra nice to your father because it will be his special day. And that's not all. In September it will be Grandparent's Day, and then you will have to be extra nice to them.

There is also a National Children's Day when everybody is supposed to be extra nice to you. The problem is that nobody really seems to know what day is the right day to celebrate Children's Day. Some say that it comes just before Mother's Day. Others say that it comes right after Father's Day. Still others say that it comes between Mother's Day and Father's Day. And because nobody seems to know the exact day, I guess that means that we just have to be extra nice to you all the time.

There is still more. In July there is a Cousin's Day. The same month but on a different day is Aunt's and Uncle's Day. In April the country celebrates National Pet's Day to honor your cat, or your dog, or your goldfish.

It is possible to think of all those family members as a kind of tree. In fact some people actually draw a picture of a tree and then they write in the names. The big, strong trunk of the tree would be your grandpa and grandma. The sturdy branches would be your mother and father. And you would be all the twigs on that tree. Think about it. You are a twig - on a branch- on the trunk - of your family tree.

But do you know what? You are also a twig on a branch on the trunk of a much bigger family tree. Think of any Sunday morning and all the people in church. They are branches and twigs in the family tree of God. In fact that tree spreads its branches around the whole world. God says that when we love Jesus we become his children and that makes us part of God's family.

God has a name for his family tree. He calls it - "church." We are God's family tree.

PENTECOST

Winkle and Waddle were walking home from church school. It was Pentecost Sunday and their teacher had told the story of that time long ago when the Holy Spirit came into the hearts of Jesus' followers. The boys were quiet for a while. Finally Winkle said, "It must have been weird. These people were all upstairs praying when they heard the wind blowing, but there was no wind. And little flames of fire came on their heads but their hair was not burned. Weird."

And then the boys began to imagine what they might have done if they had been there. One said, "If I were there, I think I would be kind of scared."

"Not me," the other boasted, "I would get the fire extinguisher in case the flames got worse."

The one added, "I would open a window to see if I could feel whether the wind was really blowing."

Now I don't know what I would have done, but those upstairs people back then got pretty excited when the Holy Spirit came into their hearts. They all ran downstairs, went into the busy street, and began telling people about Jesus. The amazing thing was that people were there from all over. Some came from Turkey, some from Africa, maybe even some from Russia. Many of them spoke different languages. But each person was able to hear the story of Jesus in their own language because those Jesus people were able to speak languages that they never even studied. And lots and lots of people became Christians that day.

As he thought about that, Winkle said, "I wonder if the Holy Spirit still comes into the hearts of people today."

"I think he does," said Waddle. "Sometimes I think I can feel him. That happens especially when I try to run real fast. Is that the Holy Spirit that I feel bumping around in my heart?"

The boys wondered how they could get the Holy Spirit into their hearts. And how could they know that the Holy Spirit lives there?

And this is the answer to Winkle and Waddle's questions. We know that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts when we love Jesus and want to live the way he wants us to live.

A DAY TO REMEMBER (Memorial Day)

This is Memorial Day weekend. That means a day off from work for those who have jobs, and a day off from school for those who go to school. And I hope it means a day of fun for all of you with your family.

The word “Memorial” means to remember. So this weekend we are supposed to remember. But what are we supposed to remember? Well, Memorial Day started many years ago after a big war. In that war many soldiers, and sailors, and airplane pilots were shot and killed by the enemy. When the war was over people in our country said, “We must never forget what a terrible thing war is. We must never forget how many brave people died because of war. We must remember.” So they started a special day to remember, and they called it “Memorial Day.”

Some of your fathers and mothers might go to the cemetery one of these days to put flowers on the grave of someone they loved, maybe a grandpa or grandma who got sick and died. Putting flowers on the grave is a sign that they loved that person who is no longer with them. And those flowers are also a sign that we are happy that grandma loved Jesus. She was not afraid to die because she knew that Jesus would take her to live with him in heaven.

To remember that grandma loved Jesus makes us happy. But we are also happy because Memorial Day is a vacation day. People who have cottages at the lake may go there and have some fun in the water. Others will be planting a garden at home. Most people think of Memorial Day as the first day of summer time and look forward to going to the beach, or camping, or doing fun stuff together.

So I guess we can say that Memorial Day is a sad-happy day, or maybe a happy-sad day. We are sad because we miss the people who are no longer with us. We are happy because we can be here together, and we can be part of a family, and we can have good friends, and we can know that we love Jesus and he loves us.

That is a good thing to remember every day, and maybe especially on Memorial Day.

VACATIONS (mid summer)

Sometimes people go on vacation in the winter time, but usually summer is the time for vacations. A vacation happens when a family takes a car, or an airplane, or a boat, or even a train and goes away from home for a few days, or maybe a week, or maybe even more than that.

You may go to visit grandpa and grandma, or to the beach, or camping, or take just a short trip to your cottage. For those vacation days you don't sleep in your bed at home, but in other beds in other places until you get back home again. Vacations are usually lots of fun, and they are wonderful times to be with your family.

So how many of you have gone on a summer vacation trip already? How many of you are still planning to go somewhere? And how many of you really don't know but you think you might just stay at home the rest of the summer?

And that's OK. Some families cannot go on a vacation. Maybe they don't have enough money, or they have too much work to do at home, or maybe somebody is sick and not able to go. Then some families take a "staycation." A va-cation is when you go away from home to some fun place. A stay-cation is when you stay at home and do fun things that you can do at home or close by for a day. You could go to the zoo, or to a pool for swimming, or you might go bowling, or go fishing. Va-cations do fun things with the family away from home. Stay-cations do fun things with your family right at home.

I really don't think that Jesus ever took a vacation. He was too busy making sick people better and teaching them about God. But I do think that Jesus took staycations. He went fishing with his friends. When he wanted to get away from all the busyness of his life he would climb up a mountain to rest, and think, and pray.

So vacations are good. And staycations are also good. Either way, it's a good time to enjoy some of the fun things in life, and it is a wonderful time to be together and to do things together as a family.

LABOR DAY

Did you know that people are funnier than anybody? Well, they are. This weekend is Labor Day weekend, right? The word “labor” means “work.” So Monday is “Work Day.” But for most people it is a day off from work or school. It’s a vacation day. So it really ought to be called “No Work Day.” But instead, “No Work Day” is called “Work Day.” People are funny.

Really though, Labor Day started a long time ago to honor people who work and to say to them: “Good job. Keep it up. You deserve a day off from work”

I want to tell you a story about a man who had something to say about work and no-work.

Once upon a time long ago in a land far away lived a king. He was very rich, had a big family, lots of horses and chariots. He was also very smart. In fact, people said that he was the smartest man in the whole world. People would come from all over and ask him really hard questions, and he would always give them a very wise and helpful answer.

Well, as the story goes, one day he was looking out of his palace window and he saw that some of his workers were lazy. They were just standing around not doing much of anything. So he called them in, and this is what he said: “You sluggards. Go find an ant. Look at how hard she is working. Now get out there and work as hard as an ant.”

The name of that wise king was Solomon. I think he was saying that sometimes God’s little creatures can be a lesson for us. Think of a slug, or a snail slowly crawling along the ground, going nowhere very fast, doing nothing very much. Now think of the tiny ant scurrying along, busy with her work: building a home, feeding her family, doing her chores.

If Solomon was here today, I think he would say, “Shame on lazy sluggards, and three cheers for hard workers.” I think he would also say, “Good idea to have a day off for those who work as hard as an ant.”

I hope you have a good Labor Day weekend. And try to say “thank you” to somebody, like maybe your mother or father, somebody who works hard so that you can be comfortable and happy.

HALLOWEEN

Waddle was excited because tonight was “trick or treat” night. He told his friend Winkle that he was going to dress up like a clown. He had a mask with a great big nose and red spots on the cheeks. He would wear his mother’s pajama top that had pink and blue squares on it.

Winkle said that he would dress up like a farmer. His grandpa let him use one of his farmer’s overalls, and if he rolled up the legs that would work. He had an old straw hat, and he would put some make believe whiskers on his face.

At 6:00 o’clock the boys met their friend Toots and Waddle’s cousin Toddle at the corner, and the four of them went on down the street. At every house they rang the doorbell or they knocked on the door and said “trick or treat.” By 7:00 their bags were nicely filled with candy, cookies, and other nice surprises.

That night Waddle could not get to sleep and his stomach felt funny. He had eaten too much candy. But still, it had been fun.

I’ll tell you the true story of the first tricksters or treaters. It was a long time ago in a country far away. Christians had a special day when they would remember wonderful people who had died and gone to heaven. It was called “All Saint’s Day.” Other people in that country hated the Christians and tried to hurt them. Sometimes they even killed them. These people were called “Druids.”

Well, in order to be nasty to the Christians on the night before that special All Saints Day the Druids put on masks and dressed up to look like ghosts and goblins. They would go to the homes of Christians and say, “Give me a treat or I will do a trick on you.” It was not an easy time to be a Christian.

I am glad that Halloween is not that kind of scary thing today. It’s just a nice make believe night. Something else: I’m glad that Christians don’t have to be afraid of Druids. And I am also glad that we don’t wear masks and dress in funny clothes all the time. God made us to be his children, and he wants us to be just the way he made us.

MR. PLUS AND MR. MINUS
(Thanksgiving Day)

Mr. Plus and Mr. Minus were at a large Thanksgiving Day dinner party. People liked to sit next to Mr. Plus because he always seemed so happy. People tried to stay away from Mr. Minus because he was a grouch.

Mr. Minus looked over that table that was filled with all kinds of wonderful food and he began his grumps. “Why do we always have to have turkey every Thanksgiving Day,” he grumbled, “Why can’t we have hot dogs instead? And a whole bowl full of squash? I hate squash. And cranberry salad! Cranberry salad makes my tongue feel funny. Why can’t we have Jell-O instead? And I bet for dessert we’ll have that stupid pudding with lumps in it.” The people sitting next to Mr. Minus did not know what to say. They knew that he was unhappy, but they did not know what to say to make him happy.

Down at the other end of the table was Mr. Plus. He smelled the food on the table. He looked at the nice mix of white meat and dark meat from the turkey. He saw the bowl of fluffy white mashed potatoes. He looked over at a shelf and saw the choice of pies for dessert: pumpkin, apple, and pecan. He said to the people who had brought food for the Thanksgiving dinner. “It looks and smells wonderful. Thank you so much.” And the people sitting around Mr. Plus all agreed.

The problem was that Mr. Plus and Mr. Minus had children who grew up to become just like their fathers.

The children of Mr. Minus were almost always unhappy because they felt that they never had enough: not enough toys, not enough fun, and not enough ice cream. The children of Mr. Plus were almost always happy. Sometimes they had a problem, but most often they were happy with what they had, and every once in a while they would say to their mother and father, “Thank you.”

Thanksgiving Day is a good day to make sure that we are the children of Mr. Plus and say a great big “Thank you” to God who loves us and takes care of us every day.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE STORY

The story of the Christmas tree begins long ago in a country on the other side of the ocean. The people in that country wondered why the leaves on some trees fell to the ground every year when it got cold, but other trees stayed green all winter long. These people did not believe in Jesus so when somebody told them that it must be spirit gods who were living in those trees, well – that seemed about right to them especially when they walked past those trees when the wind was blowing, and the trees would go swish-h-h, swish-h-h. When that happened the people thought that the spirit gods in the trees were talking to them.

One winter it was especially cold, and the people felt sorry for those spirit gods in the trees. So they cut down some trees and brought them into their homes where the spirit gods would be nice and warm. The people put candles and decorations on the trees because they thought that would make the spirit gods happy.

Then one day a Christian missionary came to that country. His name was Boniface. He told the people about the true God who sent his son Jesus to be our Savior. And the people of that country began to believe in Jesus instead of those spirit gods living in trees.

But now the people of that country had a problem. They had become so used to having a nicely decorated tree in their homes that they missed it. They knew that those trees did not have spirit gods living in them, but they still wanted a nice green tree in winter.

So Boniface had an idea. He said, “Keep your trees. Put some lights on them and hang some decorations from their branches. And then let’s call them Christmas trees. Not spirit god trees, but Christmas trees. And let them remind us of the true God who sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior and Friend.”

So that’s what they did. And that’s what we still do at Christmas time. We put a nicely decorated tree in our home or we decorate the trees in front of our home. And I think that those trees say to us, “Our God does not live in a tree. On that first Christmas God sent his Son Jesus to live in our heart.”

SECTION TWO

CHILDREN'S MESSAGES

ABOUT

WHAT WE DO IN CHURCH

WORSHIP

Let's think about a make believe story about make believe children in a make believe church. The children's names are Toots and Toddle. They had enjoyed the children's moment in big church and now they were on their way to children's church.

When the children were all in the room the teacher said, "I have a surprise for you. We have called this 'Children's Church,' right? Well, we decided to change that name to 'Children's Worship.'"

Toddle put up her hand and asked, "Why? What difference does it make?" The teacher answered, "Well, the words 'Children's Church' say where we are. We are in church. The words 'Children's' Worship' say what we do here. We come here to worship. And don't you think that what we do here is more important than where we are? We'll do the same things we always do, but now we will try to remember that what we do is a way to worship God."

"I don't understand," said Toots. So the teacher explained, "Let me show you with my hands. You can do the same thing with your hands. I raise my hand as if I am going to give somebody a high-five. That's one thing we do in children's worship. In a way we give God a high-five and say, 'Good job, God, for making such a beautiful world and taking such good care of us.' That is called praise. In worship we praise God. One way we do that is when we sing."

Then the teacher held out her hand as if she was going to get some Skittles,. "In worship we also get something from God," she said. "He gives us all these great Bible stories that help us to know Jesus and to love him."

The teacher then turned her hand over as if she was giving the Skittles away and she said, "In children's worship we also learn that God wants us to share with others."

So think of your hands. Hand up: praise God. Hand out: learn the Bible stories that God gives us. Hand turned: share with others.

That's my make believe story about make believe children in a make believe church. But this is not make believe: every Sunday we go to big church and to children's church to worship God.

SINGING

One of the first teachers that you ever had was a song. Long before you knew much about the Bible you were singing, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” You also learned that Jesus loves more children than just you alone. You sang, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.” And before you could read it, you learned from the song that the Bible is a pretty important book. “The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God. The B-I-B-L-E.”

We all know that there are lots of stories in the Bible. Think of Noah who built that big boat on dry land. And then the flood waters came, but Noah and his family, and all those animals were safe inside the Ark. Or the story about those walls of Jericho that came tumbling down. And who can forget the stories about Jesus healing sick people and teaching them about God?

Well, the Bible is not only a story book. It is also a song book. One song was written by a woman whose name was Deborah. There had been a war, and her people won. She was so happy that the war was over that she wrote a song, and all the people sang “The Song of Deborah” (Judges 5). Sometimes God’s people sang while they walked to church (Psalms 125-126). You know the story of the angel who came to Mary and told her that she was going to have a baby, and his name would be Jesus. It was kind of scary, but Mary was happy, she praised God and she sang “The Song of Mary” (Luke 1).

The Bible tells us that even God sings. I imagine that God has a really good voice for singing. God sings when he is happy. And he is happy when his people show that they love him (Zephaniah 3:17). And that is also why we sing. We sing because we’re happy. And we are happy because God loves us. We are happy because we have family and friends who also love Jesus. We are happy because we are all part of the family of God and we want to praise him because he is so great and he is so good..

And that’s why we sing in church.

PRAYING

God does not have WiFi. God does not have a smartphone. God does not have an email address. When we want to say something to God we don't text him. All we need to do is pray, because that's what prayer is. It is us talking to God.

Now we can do that just for ourselves. We can tell God what we are thinking, what we are feeling, what we are sorry for, what we hope for. He promises that he will always listen to us. And he will understand exactly what we are saying because he knows everything.

But our prayers are selfish if we only think about ourselves. It is also important to say "thank you" to God because your cousin just got a new baby brother. Or you ask God to help the people next door learn about Jesus. And you ask God to make your grandpa better so that he won't be sick any more. There are all kinds of things to talk to God about.

And then you come to church. Now there are lots more people with lots more things to talk to God about. Think of people who are sad, or afraid, or sick, or lonely, or who are sorry about something they did wrong. And there are others who are happy because they just got married, or they just had an important birthday. All those people are important to us because we are all part of one big church family, the family of God. You and all those people sitting around you are children of God. He is our Father in heaven. It is good to pray for ourselves. It is good to pray for our family. It is also good to pray for the family of God.

And there is even more than that. God tells us that he wants us to care about the needs of the world. He wants his great big family, the church, to pray for Christians in other parts of the world, for people who have no food to eat, no home in which to live, no job to go to. God wants us to pray for children who do not know Jesus.

You see, God wants all of us in his family to have a heart that is big enough to care about all those people and all those needs.

And that's why we pray in church.

PREACHING AND TEACHING (sermons and lessons)

The Bible is absolutely the most important book in the church. Song books, praise books, prayer books, library books: all these books are also important, but the Bible is more important than all the rest of them put together.

That is so because the Bible is the Word of God. Long, long ago God talked in words that people could hear, like the way I am talking to you now. But God finally decided to put everything he wanted to say into a book, and that book is the Bible. I like the song:

The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me.
I stand alone on the Word of God.
The B-I-B-L-E.

You know, of course, that there are lots of neat stories in the Bible. Some of my favorites are the one about Noah and all those animals in the Ark, or Joshua who fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down, or Jonah and the big fish that swallowed him, or Zachaeus, the wee little man who climbed into a sycamore tree because he wanted to see Jesus,

Stories like that are fun to tell and fun to listen to again and again. We never get tired of them. It must have been exciting for the people who were there.

Other parts of the Bible are not as easy to understand. I think of what the Bible says about God, and the world, and why people do bad things, and what it means to be saved, and what will heaven be like when we die.

That's why the church needs ministers and teachers who read big books and study hard to help us understand what the Bible teaches. In big church the minister preaches a sermon. A sermon is like a speech. And in Children's Church the teacher tells one of the Bible stories and then explains what that story tells us about God and why it is important for us to hear about that. But always, in big church or in Children's Church what the preacher preaches and what the teacher teaches is what the Bible says God wants us to know.

That's why we need preachers and teachers in church. They help us to know and understand what God says to us in his Word.

GIVING

(item: a church collection plate or similar)

I have here a collection plate. You probably know that. This plate goes back and forth along the rows each Sunday and people put money in it to help pay for the church and its work.

One Sunday an old man put a dollar in the collection plate. Well, this church dollar had read the Bible and knew about Jesus, but nobody had ever taken this dollar to church. It had been to McDonald's. It had traveled to Disney World. But never to church. It got kind of lonely in that collection plate because not many other dollars had joined it. Finally it said, "I want to see." So this church dollar stood up and looked over the edge of the collection plate and said, "Wow! This church must need a lot of money. I've got to help."

So that church dollar shook itself real hard and turned into one hundred pennies, because that's how many pennies there are in a dollar. Some of those pennies said, "We'll stay here and help pay for the church." Other church pennies said, "We'll get in our cars and go to help people who are hungry, who don't have enough clothing to wear, who don't even have homes to live in." Still other pennies said, "We'll get on an airplane and go to faraway places where people never heard about Jesus."

So that's what they did.

And when the church people heard how hard the church pennies were working and how much good they were doing they said, "We can help too." And that's what they did.

Well, one Sunday the church pennies came back to church. They all jumped right into the collection plate, and as the plate went back and forth along the rows, they could hardly breathe because so many dollars were being put into the plate on top of them. And the church was pleased because now it had the money it needed to keep the lights on and pay the preacher. It also had enough to go out to do God's work in the world. And God was pleased because his people were giving enough money so that God's church could be taken care of, hungry people were being fed, and people were learning about Jesus.

And that's why giving money is an important part of what the church does when we worship God.

BAPTISM

In some far away countries, like Scotland and New Zealand farmers have lots of sheep. Hundreds and hundreds of sheep. Many farmers don't keep those sheep in barns. And they don't keep them in fences with gates. In those countries there are wide open spaces with lots of green grass. So the farmers just let their sheep wander in these open fields and nibble on the grass.

But there is a problem. If farmer Joe lets his sheep wander in the open field, and farmer George lets his sheep wander the same place, how will they know which sheep belong to which farmer?

So this is what they do. They put a little bit of spray paint on the shoulder of each sheep just below her neck. Farmer Joe might use red paint. Farmer George might use blue. And that is how they know which sheep belong to which farmer.

That is what baptism does. It is a sign that you belong to God. I guess we could say that God spray painted you in the water of baptism. God puts his mark on you. You can't see it. I can't see it. But God can. And that sign will never, ever go away. In baptism, God says, "You belong to me. I have put my mark on you. You are my child."

But something else. Baptism also makes us clean – not on the outside but on the inside. When you do something naughty you know it was the wrong thing to do. You may look the same on the outside. Maybe nobody knows the wrong thing that you did. But deep on the inside you know it and it makes your heart feel kind of dirty. And you want somebody to come and wash your heart clean.

Well, the water of baptism is God's way of saying, "If you are really sorry for what you did, I will wash your heart and make you all clean again. Just like water can make the outside of you clean, so the water of baptism," says God, "is a sign that my love will make your heart clean."

And just as God's mark on you lasts for as long as you live, so that promise to wash your heart clean will also last for as long as you live.

I think that is pretty wonderful. I hope you do too

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus knew that he was going to die. He knew that bad people were going to put him on a cross and it would really hurt. Jesus also knew that on Easter morning he would come back to life, but that did not make dying on a cross any easier. But he was willing to die because he knew it was the only way that we can live with God's love in our hearts, and then go to be with God in heaven after we die.

Well, the afternoon before he was put on that cross Jesus decided to have one last supper with his friends, who were also called disciples. He told them to get the supper ready and then he joined them. After they had all eaten their supper Jesus took bread, not a slice of bread but a chunk of bread, and he broke off pieces and gave a piece to each disciple, and he said, "Just like I broke this bread, my body will be broken on the cross."

Then he took wine (maybe it was grape juice) and poured some into a cup. He passed the cup around for each to take a sip and then he said the same kind of thing about his blood that would be poured out just like he poured the wine.

That is exactly what happened, isn't it? Jesus' body was broken when they put those nails in his hands, and his blood came out, and then he died. But in the Lord's Supper Jesus says to us, "Don't feel sorry for me. Remember that I did this because I love you. I did this because I want you to live with God's love in your heart. I did this because some day I want you to live in heaven with me."

That last supper that Jesus had with his disciples happened a long time ago. But in big church we still do what Jesus did with his disciples so many years ago. Christians still eat the bread and we drink the juice and we remember that when Jesus died on the cross it was for us.

Some churches call this The Lord's Supper. Some other churches call it The Eucharist. That's a good word. Eucharist. It means "Thank you, God, for the wonderful gift of your love."

SECTION THREE

CHILDREN'S MESSAGES

WITH OBJECTS

THE YABUTS

(Item: a shoe box with a lid. In the bottom print in large, black letters YABUT. Tie a string around the box to give the impression of needed security. Keep box closed until it is time to reveal its content.)

In this box I have a Yabut. Not a rabbit, nor a “wabbit.” It’s a Yabut. I’ll show it to you, but first I want to warn you about Yabuts. You might have them in your home, and if you do they can be dangerous, especially between parents and children. Yabuts are invisible; you can’t see them. They don’t have wings so they can’t fly. They don’t have legs so they can’t run. I don’t know of any bug spray that will kill them. And there is no trap that can catch them.

Are you ready to see it? I tied a string around the box so the Yabut could not get out. But I’ll take the lid off, and there it is, right there in the bottom of the box. A Yabut.

Do you recognize it? Let’s suppose that you are having lots of fun playing with your friends in your back yard. Your mother calls from the kitchen window, “Time to come in for supper.” And you say, “Yabut, I’m having so much fun.” Your father says, “Time for bed.” And you say, “Yabut, this video game is so-o-o good.” Can you see how easy it is for the Yabuts to sneak into your home?

Jesus once told a story about Yabuts. He said, “Once upon a time a man prepared a wonderful dinner. He invited several people to come. But one said, ‘Yabut, I can’t come right now because I just bought a new field and I have to check on it.’ Another said, ‘Yabut, I can’t come right now because I just bought some animals and I have to take care of them.’ A third said, ‘Yabut, I can’t come because I am getting married.’” Jesus said, “They all began to make excuses.” (Luke 14) I think the man in that story must have been very disappointed.

When Jesus asks us to love him and invite him to live in our heart, it’s a pretty good idea not to say, “Yabut, not now.” It’s also a pretty good idea to keep the Yabuts out of your home.

A RIDDLE

(Item: a candle, any size or color in a bag or box so it is not visible)

In this bag I have the answer to a riddle. A riddle is something you say or a question you ask and it has a kind of surprise answer. Here's one: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" An answer: "To get to the other side." You probably know that one. But that's a riddle.

Well, here is another riddle. What I have in this bag can be either big or little. It can be either tall or short. It can be either fat or skinny. It can be any color. But here is the most important hint: it can be used or it can just sit around, looking pretty. But if it is used, the longer it is used the shorter it will become. Can you guess what it is?

I'll take it out of the bag. It's a candle, right? Candles come in all colors, sizes and shapes, but one thing is true about every candle. It is possible for a candle just to sit around, doing nothing except looking pretty. But if it is used, if you light the end so that the candle burns, then the longer it burns the shorter it becomes, right? The longer it burns the shorter it gets.

But that's what a candle is supposed to do. People who make candles make them so that they will burn. God said that is also why he made people. He made us, as Jesus said, to be as lights in the world shining with God's love. You know that song, don't you? "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, all the time."

Of course, if a candle burns all the time it will get shorter and shorter. It still burns just as brightly, maybe even brighter. It just gets shorter. Your grandpa and grandma are shorter candles than you are because they have been burning as lights for Jesus for a long time. Your candle is big and tall. You have a lot of burning for Jesus to do. You have a whole life to let your light shine.

"Put it under a bushel? No! I'm going to let it shine, let it shine, all the time."

I hope it will – for a long, long time.

THE PAPER AIRPLANE

(Making the airplane: Needed: a sheet of rectangular paper, like copy paper
First: take the upper right corner and fold it over until the top edge of the paper is flush with the left side. Repeat from the left side to create a triangle which serves as the “nose” of the airplane.

Next fold the paper in half lengthwise from the point of its “nose” to its rear to create the “cabin.” Then fold each side about half way down to create the “wings.”

To reveal the cross, tear off the “wings” and unfold the rest of the paper.
Suggestion: try it before going public.)

This morning I’m going to make a paper airplane. There are several ways to make a paper airplane, but I’m going to show you my way.

(Describe what you are doing: “nose,” “cabin,” “wings.” Be creative in your description.)

Now if this were a real airplane that could fly with people in it, it could take us anywhere in the world. If it had strong enough rocket engines it could even take us all the way to the moon, and maybe even to Mars.

But there is one place where an airplane can never take us. No matter how strong the motors are there is one place that an airplane can never take us. It can never take us to heaven. And yet, this paper airplane can show us the way to heaven without actually taking us there.

I’ll show you. Watch. Since this airplane cannot take us to heaven, we might just as well tear the wings off.

(Tear off and discard the wings, unfold the rest, hold up the cross)

Jesus died on a cross. And then on Easter he came back to life and went back to heaven to be with his father and the angels. He did all that so that we can live with God’s love in our hearts now, and someday go to live with Jesus in heaven.

THE PET GLOVE

(Item: any size woman's or man's glove)

Most people who have pets have either a cat or a dog, maybe they have both. Children sometimes have pet goldfish or a turtle. Can you imagine that some people have a pet snake, or a pet pig?

People who have pets often try to train them. Most often they try to train them not to use the bathroom in the house. It is possible to train a dog to sit up, or to beg. Cats are harder to train to do those things, and it's impossible to imagine training a snake, or a goldfish.

Well, imagine having a pet glove, and then trying to train that glove to do some interesting things. (Use the glove to demonstrate the following moves.) We could try train it to sit up, but it would just flop over. Or try to train it to make a fist, or to wave good bye. but that pet glove would not understand. The only thing that the pet glove is good at is just lying around.

UNTIL

Until we put our hand in that glove. And then the glove can do all kinds of interesting things because our hand has filled the glove.

Before Jesus went back to heaven to be with his Father, he told his friends that when he got to heaven he and the Father would send their Spirit, the Holy Spirit to be with them. And that's what happened. Jesus' friends, the disciples, were hiding because they were scared to tell anybody about Jesus. They were sad because Jesus had died on the cross. They were lonely because he was no longer with them. They just did not know what to do.

And then the Holy Spirit came. The Bible says that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, like a hand fills a glove. And now they could do all kinds of good things for Jesus. They told people about him. They sang because they were happy that Jesus loved them very much. They were no longer lonely because the Holy Spirit was living in their hearts.

They were no longer empty gloves, but they were filled with the Spirit of God. And that Spirit still lives in the hearts of all those who love Jesus.

GOD'S FUNNELS
(Item: a funnel, any size or style)

This is a funnel. You probably know that. The idea is that if you have a big jar of stuff and you want to pour some of it into a little bottle, you can pour it into the wide top of the funnel, and it will come out the smaller bottom. For example, if you had a jug of apple juice, and you wanted to pour it into a sippy cup, you might want a funnel so that you don't spill.

Now let's suppose that you felt kind of silly one day, and you took the jug and poured the apple juice into the top of the funnel, but you held a finger in the opening at the bottom. You know what would happen? When the top of the funnel was full of apple juice, and it could not get out the bottom, the apple juice would just sit there, looking bored. You could not pour any more in because none had come out the bottom.

Now you don't look like funnels to me, but you really are. Let's suppose that you do something really naughty. Maybe nobody else knows, but you know and you know that God knows. It makes you feel dirty on the inside. So you tell God that you are really sorry and you will try never to do that again. Do you know what God does? He pours his forgiving love into your heart. Like the funnel was full of apple juice, your heart is full of God's love, and you feel all clean on the inside again.

But then let's suppose that the girl next door says something mean to you and you get angry. Even if she says, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," you stay angry and won't talk to her. That is putting your finger in the bottom of the funnel. If God's love does not come out of your heart towards others, then there is no more room for God to put his love into your heart.

I guess we could say that we are God's funnels. God pours his love into us and it goes through us and out into our love for others.

THE SHAPES OF FLATLAND

(Items: shapes – triangle, circle, rectangle, square, and a ball)

Many years ago there was a make believe land known as “Flatland.”: No people lived there, but only shapes. There was Mrs. Triangle Shape and her daughter Circle. Mr. Rectangle Shape lived there, and so did Mr. Square Shape. They were known around the world as “The Shapes of Flatland.”

The Shapes of Flatland had never learned how to stand. They just lay flat in the fields of Flatland. Mr. Stick often walked that way as he went to work. Without thinking he often stepped right on the Shapes of Flatland. The children of Mr. and Mrs. Rock thought that Mr. Square Shape was a trampoline, so they tried to jump on him. And that hurt. The only thing that the Shapes could do was to look up. They saw lots of sky. They counted the clouds. But they could not see much else. The Shapes of Flatland were not very happy.

Then one day Mrs. Ball came rolling onto the fields of Flatland. She saw the Shapes just lying there and she asked, “Why don’t you get up and run and walk and play?” Mr. Rectangle Shape answered, “Because nobody ever taught us how to stand.”

“Well I can fix that,” said Mrs. Ball. So she took Circle Shape by her edge, set her up, and said, “Now roll!” So she did. Mrs. Ball took Mrs. Triangle by the pointy top of her head and said, “Now get out there and tumble!” So she did. Finally Mrs. Ball picked up Mr. Square and Mr. Rectangle by one of their corners and she said, “Off with you. Go run!” And they did.

All that day the Shapes of Flatland rolled and tumbled and ran and jumped. It was wonderful. They saw things that they had never seen before. They saw mountains and rivers and horses and cows.

That evening they invited Mrs. Ball to join them for a supper of hot dogs and potato chips. As they told each other the amazing things they had seen, they bubbled with excitement. It was all so big. And wonderful. And beautiful.

“What is it called? What is its name?” they asked Mrs. Ball. “And where did it come from?”

“It’s called creation,” she answered. “And the Lord God made it all.”

SECTION FOUR
CHILDREN'S MESSAGES
BASED ON
BIBLE STORIES

THE STORY OF MR. ENOCH

It was a warm summer evening. The boys were walking to the park to play with their friends. Neither of them said anything for a while. Finally Waddle said, “I don’t get it. When my father is home for supper he usually reads some verses from the Bible. Tonight he read something about a man whose name was Enoch. He walked with God. How could he walk with God? God is a spirit, and he doesn’t have legs.”

“I don’t know,” said Winkle. “But God can do anything. Maybe he made some legs for himself so that he could walk with Enoch.”

By that time the boys were at the park. They played there until it began to get dark and then they went back home. They had so much fun that they forget all about Mr. Enoch who walked with God.

So what does it mean – to walk with God? If Enoch walked with God, then God must have walked with Enoch, right? Waddle was right, God does not have legs. So if Enoch walked with God, and God walked with Enoch, how did they do that?

Well, when our hearts are open to love God, then God lives in our heart. So God is with us all the time. We can’t see God, or feel him, but he is right there, in our hearts. When we walk, we walk with God in our heart, right? So we can also say that when we run, we run with God, or eat with God, or sleep with God. God is with us, all the time, everywhere.

We probably don’t think a whole lot about that every day, but it seems that Mr. Enoch did. He tried to do things, say things, think things that would please God. He did not want to make God feel uncomfortable living there in his heart. Surely there were times when Mr. Enoch forgot, and did something wrong. But then he would tell God that he was really sorry, and that he would try to do better.

I hope that Waddle’s father explained that to him before he went to bed that night. And I hope he explained to Waddle that God lives in the hearts of all those who show God that they love him by living the way Mr. Enoch did.

JACOB'S LADDER

Jacob was not a very nice brother. He stole something very important from his brother Esau, and then he lied to his father Isaac about it. He was afraid that Esau would be really angry and try to hurt him. So his mother suggested that he go away from home for a while and work on his Uncle Laban's farm where he would take care of the goats and sheep.

His first night on the trip he could not find a campsite or a hotel, so he found some soft grass, he found a smooth rock that he would use for a pillow, and he fell asleep.

That night he had a dream. In his dream he saw a ladder going from where he was sleeping all the way to heaven. And then he saw angels on that ladder going up and down between heaven and earth. You would think that the angels had been in heaven and came down the ladder to check on Jacob and then would go back into heaven to be with God. But that is not the way it went. The Bible says that first the angels ascended – they went up. And then they descended - they came back down to watch over Jacob. (Genesis 28:12)

You see, the angels had been with Jacob all the time. And while he was sleeping they went up to report to God and then they came back down again so that they could continue to watch over Jacob as he went on his way to Uncle Laban's farm.

God has more angels than we could ever count. They praise God in heaven, but they also do God's work on earth. They are here now, in this place, all around us. We can't see them. We can't hear them. We can't feel them. They are God's spirit angels, and they are with us when we play, or go to school, or go on a trip. They are with us when we go to the doctor, or have to be in the hospital, or when we go to sleep. In all the dark and scary places the angels are there with us. We are never alone.

I guess that should not surprise us. After all, the Bible says that God "commands his angels concerning us to guide us in all our ways." (Psalm 91:11)

GOD HAS A PLAN

God has a plan for each one of us. Sometimes his plan makes us glad. Sometimes it makes us sad. Like the story of Joseph.

Joseph was nuisance kind of brother. For one thing he had dreams in which his older brothers bowed down to him. He could not help it that he had dreams, but he liked to tell his dreams to his brothers. It's no wonder that they did not like him. Sometimes they would say to each other, "We have to get rid of this dreamer."

And one day it happened. The brothers were working in the field when they saw Joseph coming down the road. "Now's our chance," they said. Some said, "Let's kill him." But others said, "No, let's put him in this dry well."

Along about then some bad men came down the road. These men actually paid money to buy people and then sold them to be slaves in another country. And that is what happened to Joseph. He was sold to become a slave in Egypt. There he spent years in prison for a crime that he did not commit. Maybe he wondered why God's plan for his life was bringing him into so much unhappiness.

But God's plan was at work. One day Joseph got out of prison and he became one of the most important people in Egypt where he was put in charge of the food. Egypt had lots of food, but up north where his brothers lived there was not enough food. So the brothers had to travel to Egypt and buy food from Joseph. At first they did not recognize Joseph. But when they did, they were really scared. They thought for sure that Joseph would get back at them and maybe put them in prison for the rest of their lives.

And that is when Joseph explained to his brothers how God's plan works. He said something like this, "I know that you tried to do me harm. And you did. It was no fun at all. But," said Joseph, "God had a plan to get me to Egypt so that I could sell food for you and your hungry families."

And that is still the way it is: God's plan for your life is sometimes glad, sometimes sad. But always it is the plan of our good and loving God.

THE TWO GIANTS

This is a story about two giants. One giant was named Goliath. The other giant was named David.

Enemies of God had come to fight against God's people. They wanted to steal their farms and make God's people their slaves. In those days armies would camp on either side of a valley and shoot at each other with spears and arrows. The army of the enemy had a soldier who was really big and strong and very scary. He was so big that if he would stand under a basketball net his head would be in the net. He also had a loud voice, and he called across the valley, "I dare one of you to come and fight against me. If you kill me, we will stop fighting against you and all go home. But if I kill you, we will take your farms and you will be our slaves."

Nobody in God's army dared to say, "I'll go." Nobody dared to fight the giant until David heard about this challenge of the giant. David was much smaller than Goliath, but he said, "I will fight the giant." And he did. Maybe you know the song that describes how it went.

Only a boy named David, only a little sling;
Only a boy named David, but he could pray and sing;
Only a boy named David, five little stones he took,
And one little stone went in the sling
And round and round and round and round it went
And one little stone went in the air and the giant came tumbling down.

How did David have the courage to fight this powerful and scary giant? He told us how he did it. When he came close enough for the giant to hear him he said, "You come at me with your sword and spear. But I come at you in the name of the Lord." Goliath was a giant on the outside. David was a giant on the inside. But the real giant in this story is God. It was God who gave David courage. It was God who guided that one little stone right into the head of Goliath. It was God who gave the victory to his people.

And God is still the courage-giving giant who lives in the hearts of all those who love him.

A FAMOUS PRAYER CONTEST

Back then so many years ago some people carved things out of wood or stone, and then they said that these things that they had made were their gods. They prayed to these things and thought that the piece of wood or stone would hear them and help them. Some people called their god “Baal.” Elijah knew that the God who is our Father in heaven is the one true God of heaven and earth. But many people did not believe him.

So they agreed to a contest, a prayer contest, to decide whose god was the true god who hears and helps his people. They built altars, put on wood and other things that would burn. Each side would pray that their god would send fire from heaven to burn up what was on the altar.

The Baal people went first. “Oh Baal,” they prayed, “hear and answer us.” Nothing happened. Those pieces of wood or stone just stood there. “Call him louder,” said Elijah. “Maybe Baal is sleeping, or maybe he is on vacation.” All day long they prayed. They shouted. They jumped up and down. They even cut themselves with knives. But nothing happened. Their false god of wood or stone could not help them.

Then it was Elijah’s turn. To make the contest even harder he poured water all over the altar and even on the ground around the altar. And then he prayed. He did not shout. He did not jump up and down. He simply prayed, “Oh God, please prove to these people that you alone are the one true God.” And then it happened. Fire came down from heaven and burned up everything that was on the altar. Even the water was all boiled away. And all the people knew for sure that the God who is our Father in heaven is the one only true God who hears and answers the prayers of his people.

In this wonderful story from the Bible God not only showed that he alone is God, but he also showed us that we don’t have to shout or jump up and down and cut ourselves in order to get his attention. When we pray we can use our very simple words that come from our heart. God will hear us, and he will answer us.

DANIEL

Daniel lived in the land of Palestine. There was a war and Daniel, along with lots of other people, was taken into captivity in the land of Babylon. The king there said that nobody may worship any god except himself, the king. “Well,” Daniel thought, “I worship the true God of heaven and earth. No king is going to tell me that I may not worship my God.” So he continued to disobey the king and worshipped God. As punishment for disobeying the king, Daniel was put into a den, or cage, with hungry lions. His enemies thought for sure that the lions would kill him. But God had other plans. The Bible says that God “shut the mouth of the lions.” Daniel may have been scared, but he was safe.

About three hundred years later somebody heard that Bible story about Daniel and was so impressed that he wrote an imaginary story to honor the way God took care of Daniel. Here is how his make believe story goes.

He imagines that Daniel had been in the lion’s den for six days. Although the lions were hungry they never touched Daniel. The problem was that after six days with no food Daniel was hungry too.

Back in the land of Palestine God’s prophet, whose name was Habakkuk, was cooking a pot of soup for his supper. God said to him, “Habakkuk, take the soup and bring it to Daniel in the lion’s den.” “But Lord,” said Habakkuk, “I don’t know where the den is, and I don’t know the way to Babylon.”

So God sent an angel who picked Habakkuk up by his hair (he had long hair) and with the speed of the wind the angel flew the prophet and his soup to Babylon and put him down right over the lion’s den. Daniel praised God for taking such good care of him, and the angel once again picked Habakkuk by his hair and flew him back to his home in Palestine.*

Probably three hundred years from now nobody will write an imaginary story about you. And that is OK. God may never shut the mouths of lions or fly an angel to bring you food. But each day God sends his angels to protect you and each day he gives you food. Most important, God gives you his love.

*The third episode in the apocryphal *Bell and the Dragon*

THE HUNGER OF JEALOUSY

A man and his two sons owned a farm. The name of the older son was Sam. The name of the younger son was Silas. Sam was a good worker. Silas was a goof-off.

So it did not surprise anybody when Silas told his father that he wanted money from his share of the farm because he wanted to see the world. He got on a bus and traveled to a faraway city where he went to an expensive hotel, he bought a fancy car, he ate too much, he drank too much, he gambled. And soon his money was all gone. So he made a sign and stood on a street corner asking people for some money so he could buy food.

One day, standing on the street corner, he thought to himself, ‘What a fool I am! Even the pigs on the farm have more to eat than I do.’ So he decided to go back home, hoping his father would let him back in the house. In fact, every day his father looked down the road, hoping that Silas would come back. And when he did, the father hugged him, gave him clean clothes, and that night they had a party to welcome the son home.

While Silas was enjoying his party, Sam was at the barn fixing the tractor. One of the farm workers said, ‘Aren’t you going to join the party?’ ‘No way,’ said Sam. ‘My brother wasted his money and gave the family a bad reputation. Here I am, working on the farm every day from morning until night, and I never had a party. Why does my goof-off brother get one? They can have their stupid party, but I am not going in.’

Do you see what was happening there? Sam was jealous of his brother. Because he was jealous he became angry. Because he was angry he missed the party. Because he missed the party he felt lonely. And because he felt lonely, and angry, and jealous, he was the most miserable person in the family. But also his father was hurt, Silas was disappointed, and the farm workers were surprised.

Jealousy is like a hungry lion. It eats away at our happiness. The more jealous we are, the more unhappy we are. The Bible says, ‘Be happy with what you have.’ That is good advice.

TWO MEN WENT TO CHURCH

Two men went to church. During prayer time people were invited to stand where they were, and offer their own prayer. Usually those prayers were for somebody who was sick, or who needed a job, or for a baby who was born, or a wedding last week. That kind of thing.

One man was sitting near the front. He stood up, turned around to face the people, and with a loud voice started to pray something like this: “God,” he said, “Thank you that I am better than all these other people. I obey all your laws. I give lots of money to the church. The people of this church are lucky to have somebody as good as I am.” He turned around, and sat down.

The other man was sitting farther back. He stood up, bowed his head and began to pray something like this: “Lord,” he prayed, “Thank you for loving me. I don’t deserve it, Lord. There are so many things that I do wrong. And there are so many good things that I ought to do, but I don’t. I am sorry, Lord. Please forgive me and help me to do better.” And he sat down. Some people in church that morning wiped away a tear because they felt in their heart that they were no better than this man.

When the church service was over both men left to meet their friends. The man who prayed so boastfully stood near the door, expecting that people would thank him for being such a wonderful member. But nobody said a word to him. Most people did not even look at him. They were ashamed of him because of his boasting.

The other man also left church. He met his friends, and talked with a visitor to church, and then he and his family went home.

Jesus told a story like that. When he was finished he said, “The man who prayed with his head bowed went home that morning with peace in his heart.” He was not disappointed that nobody said, “Good prayer.” He was humbly thankful that God heard him and made him feel that his heart was clean.

God is not pleased when people brag about themselves. But he promises to bless you with peace in your heart when you think less of yourself and more of God.

WHO WAS LOOKING FOR WHOM?

Most children like to watch a parade, especially a big one with marching bands and a fire engine. But for some children watching a parade can be a problem. Big people are crowding along the side of the street and you can't see over them or around them. All you can see are their legs, unless some kind

person moves over and says, "Come up here in front so you can see."

That was the problem of Zacchaeus. Jesus was coming to town. People crowded along the side of the road to see him. And then there was Zacchaeus, "a wee little man was he." All he could see was the legs of the people. And nobody moved over so he could see because most people did not like Zacchaeus. He had a way of cheating people out of their money.

But Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. He saw a sycamore tree with some low branches. He climbed into the tree, and there he sat: this wee little man perched on the branch of a sycamore tree so that he would be able to see Jesus.

While this was going on Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he would die. As he came into the city of Jericho he surely saw the people crowding to see him. Maybe he looked down at the road to make sure he did not stumble. But he did not look up into the trees until he came to the tree where Zacchaeus sat. At that point Jesus looked up, saw this little man on a branch, and he said, "Zacchaeus, you come down. I want to come into your home today." Zacchaeus probably scrambled out of that sycamore tree, and he and Jesus walked together to his home.

Now, who was looking for whom? Was Zacchaeus looking for Jesus? Yes he was. Was Jesus looking for Zacchaeus? Yes he was. And when the two of them met, Zacchaeus was never the same again. This man, who had cheated people out of their money, now became an honest and generous follower of Jesus.

Jesus still looks for us. He says, "Come to me. I want to live in your heart today." It is good for us to say, "That is exactly what I have been looking for, so 'Into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus.'"

SECTION FIVE
CHILDREN'S MESSAGES
ON
GENERAL SUBJECTS

THE LITTLE HEARTSEASE

Sometimes it is hard to be happy with who we are. Maybe you want to have lots of friends, but you don't. Or maybe you want to be really good in sports and games, but you're not. Or maybe you just feel sad all over and you only want to say "Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. Guess I'll eat some worms." There are times when we might not like ourselves very much and we wish that we were more like somebody else.

I want to tell you a story about that. There was once a King who had a garden with lots of flowers and trees. One day the king was walking in his garden and he heard the oak tree crying big oak tree sobs. "Why my dear oak tree," said the king, "what makes you so sad?" "King," said the oak, "I'm so big and clumsy. If only I were like the apple tree. At least the apple tree has fruit that people can eat. Only squirrels are interested in my acorns."

So the king went to the apple tree, but it was crying big tears of apple juice. "King" said the apple tree, "if only I were more like the grape vine. My branches are so twisted, and worms come to eat my fruit. I wish I were more like the grape vine." But the grape vine was also crying because it was so unhappy being what it was.

As the king was about to leave the garden, he noticed a little heartsease flower near the gate. The heartsease was singing away as happy as could be. "My dear little heartsease," said the king, "what makes you so happy?" "King," said the flower, "you wanted me in your garden, and you planted me right here at the gate. And because I am what you wanted me to be in this place where you wanted me to grow, I'm going to be the best little heartsease that I know how to be."

The little heartsease flower had it exactly right.

You and I may be just little flowers in God's garden of people. Maybe God wants somebody else to be as strong as an oak tree or as pretty as a rose bush. But God made you to be you, and he wants you to be the very best you that you can be,

GOD HAS GOOD EARS

Let's suppose that you had a very long rope, and a super strong arm, and you wanted to say something to God. Let's suppose that the only way that you could talk to God would be to climb a rope that would reach all the way to heaven. So you would take the rope and throw one end of it as far as you could. God would catch that end of the rope and hold it real tightly. You would tie the other end to a big tree.

Then, if you had a super strong arm, you would also probably be strong enough to climb up that rope. You would go hand over hand all the way to heaven. It could be dangerous, you know. You would have to look out for airplanes, and satellites, and space ships.

But let's suppose that you would finally reach the top. There you would tell God what you wanted him to hear. He would listen very carefully, and then you would go back down the rope.

It sounds like a crazy idea, doesn't it? And it is. But it makes me feel so glad that we don't have to climb a rope in order to talk with God. We don't have to shout. We don't have to stand in line to wait for our turn because at the same time that God is in heaven, he is right here with us.

In fact, God is so close to us that his Spirit actually lives in our hearts. And right there, in our hearts, God has his ears wide open to hear whatever we want to say to him. If you are happy, tell God. Are you afraid? Ask God to keep you safe. Or are you sad, or angry, or lonely, or you did something wrong and it bothers you? Tell God about it. Nothing is too big or too small; nothing is too good or too bad. Whether it is daytime or nighttime, God is always ready to hear it all.

So we don't have to climb a rope, or shout, or stand in line for our turn. God's ears are so good that even if all of us would be praying a different prayer at the same time, God would hear each word of every prayer.

THE SAD MISTAKE OF LITTLE BO PEEP

Once there was a girl. She was quite small for her age. Her last name was Peep. Her father was Mr. Peep. Her mother was Mrs. Peep. The girl's first name was Bo. She was known as Little Bo Peep. Mr. Peep was a farmer. He had some sheep. And in the summer time when there was no school Little Bo had to watch some of the sheep. That was her job for the summer.

Well, one summer day she did not do her job very well. She was not paying attention, and she lost her sheep. Now it is hard to lose sheep. For one thing they are big enough, and for another thing they do not run very fast. It seems that they just wandered off. Bo Peep looked around, did not see the sheep, and said, "Where did they go? I lost my sheep and don't know where to find them."

And that is when she made her sad mistake. She said to herself, "I'll just leave them alone and hope that they will all come back home, wagging their tails behind them."

We really don't know whether those sheep ever came back home. We don't know how Little Bo explained this sad mistake to her father. We don't know whether he was angry or just disappointed.

But we do know that Jesus once told another story about a farmer who had exactly one hundred sheep. He was trying to watch over all of them, but one of them wandered away and got lost. The farmer counted his sheep. Ninety-nine. One was lost! So he made sure that the ninety-nine were safe, and he went off to find the one that got lost. He found that sheep, and carried it back to the farm.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. Those who love me are my sheep and my lambs. I know them and they know me. And no one will ever steal them from me." He could have added, "And if one of them wanders away from my love, I will find that sheep and bring it back to me."

We are Jesus' sheep and his lambs. He knows each one of us by our name. And Jesus will never ever make the sad mistake of Little Bo Peep. He promises never to leave us alone.

THE PEOPLE WHO HAD NO ELBOWS

Once upon a time in a land of castles and forts there lived a very kind knight. He had a magic wand that was made of pure gold. He could never use the wand to make himself stronger or richer. He could only use it to help others. He once saw a poor man lying on the side of the road with only rags to wear. He waved his magic wand and said “Dress!” And the man suddenly had nice clothes to wear.

One day this knight rode his horse out of his castle and came into a land that he had never seen before. Across a beautiful green meadow was a castle. He rode up to the castle, knocked on the door, but nobody answered. The door was not locked, so he pushed it open, went down a long marble hallway and came into a large room. There were lots of people in that room. But nobody seemed happy.

He soon saw why the people were not happy. These people had no elbows. They could not bend their arms. Mothers and fathers could not hold their babies. Friends could not hug each other. It was awfully hard to get dressed. It was almost impossible to eat. They could not bend their arms because they had no elbows. Not only could they not help themselves, but they could not help each other. It was not a happy sight. How can you live and how can you help others if you have no elbows?

Well the knight said to himself, “I have to do something about this.” So he took his magic wand, waved it over the room, and with a loud voice said, “ELBOWS!” By the magic of the golden wand, everybody suddenly had elbows. Mothers and fathers could hold their babies. Friends could hug each other. People could help each other with their chores. They could not only take care of themselves, but they could also take care of each other. And they were very happy.

I think that one of the reasons that God gave us elbows is so that we can help each other. Or as God said it, “Help those who have need, and be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:29, 32). It is much easier to do that because we have elbows.

WATER BUGS AND DRAGONFLIES

It was a hot summer afternoon. The boys were walking home after swimming at the city park. Waddle was very quiet. Two days ago his grandma had died. Finally he asked, “What happens next?”

“What do you mean?” Winkle asked. “What do you mean about what happens next?”

“I mean, what happens when we die? What comes next?”

Winkle said, “I don’t know, but when my grandpa died my mother told me a story about water bugs and dragonflies. The story says that there were these water bugs that lived in the mud at the bottom of the lily pond. Every once in a while one of the bugs climbed up the stem of a pond lily and never came back. The other bugs wondered where their friends had gone and why they never came back to tell them what it was like.

“The story said that one day a very brave bug said, ‘I will climb the lily stem, and then come back to tell you where the others have gone.’ So that’s what he did. When he got to the top of the lily stem he crawled out on top of a big green leaf. I guess the sun dried his body and changed him into a dragonfly. He spread his wings and did what water bugs could never do. He flew all over the place. It must have been lots of fun.”

“And then he remembered that he had promised the other bugs to come back and tell them how wonderful it was. So he dove down, and SMACK! He hit the water, but he could not go down to his friends in the mud. My mother said that his exciting dragonfly life could never be changed back into his old water bug life. I guess she told me that story,” Winkle said, “to say that my grandpa now had a heaven life and could not come back to an earth life.”

Winkle was right, of course. Both Waddle’s grandma and Winkle’s grandpa had loved Jesus. And when they died they were changed to enjoy the life of heaven. Those who die cannot come back to us. But someday we can go to be with them and with Jesus forever and ever.

And nothing could ever be better than that.

THE STORY OF THREE TREES

Once upon a time three young trees were growing up together in a large forest. One day one of the trees said to the other two, "When I grow up I want to be cut down and made into a beautiful baby's crib where the king and the queen will put their little prince to bed." The second tree said, "When I grow up I want to be cut down and made into a great desk where a famous teacher will lay her papers to teach a class of really smart people. The third tree said, "I really don't want to be cut down at all. I want to stand right here, straight and tall, pointing to the sky."

Years later, when the trees were all grown up, a woodsman came with his ax and cut all three of them down.

He sold the first tree to a carpenter who cut the tree into boards. Out of the boards he made a manger where the farmer could put straw and food for his cows. It was not a fancy crib in a king's palace, but the world has never forgotten that in that manger Mary and Joseph put the baby Jesus. And the tree was not sad because it knew that a manger for Jesus was much better than a crib in a king's palace.

The woodsman sold the second tree to a boat builder. He used the wood to make a fisherman's boat. One day Jesus stood in that boat and he taught the people along the shore. It was not a fancy desk for a famous teacher. It was just a fisherman's boat. But the tree was not sad because it knew that a place for Jesus to teach was much better than a classroom desk.

The woodsman sold the third tree to a Roman soldier who made it into a cross on which Jesus died. The tree was sad because Jesus had to die. Yet it knew that what happened on that tree was just about the most important thing in the world.

None of the three trees got what they wanted. But all three of them got something so much greater. There is nothing wrong in saying what we want. But there is everything right about doing what God wants.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Robert Louis Stevenson lived about 150 years ago in the country of Scotland. He wrote lots of books, and lots of stories, and lots of poems. He made some of his poems into a book of poems especially for children. He called the book *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

One day, when Robert was probably about your age, he went to the toy closet in his house to pick out a toy. The windows of the house were open, and it was kind of windy outside. The wind came through the window and blew the closet door shut when Robert was inside looking for a toy.

There was no light in the closet. All of a sudden that toy closet became a dark and scary place. Robert reached for where he knew the door handle must be. He turned the knob, but the door would not open. He tried with all his strength, but the closet door was stuck. He called for his mother or his father and finally his father heard him calling from inside the closet. His father took the knob on the outside of the closet door and tried to turn it. But it would not turn. He tried hard, but he could not get the door to open either.

And this is what happened then. Through the wooden door, his father said, "Bobby" (I think that's what he called him), "Bobby, I'm going to get a locksmith who will come and fix the door. I'll be right back."

In just a few minutes his father was back. And again, through the wooden door he said, "I'm back now, and I promise you that I will stay right here until the locksmith comes and gets the door open." Robert could not see his father. But he knew that he was right there outside the door, and he would stay there until the locksmith came to open the door.

If you ever get stuck in a dark and scary place, I am sure that your mother or father will be right there to stay with you.

But I know someone else who is always with you both in the dark places of life and the bright and sunny places. God once said, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." (Hebrews 13:4).

That is good to know.

WHEN THE CRICKETS SANG

Francis of Assisi was not a sissy. His first name was Francis, which can be a boy's name. And he was born in the city of Assisi. So he became known as Francis of Assisi.

When he was young his friends in the neighborhood thought that he was the luckiest boy on the street. His parents were very rich, and young Francis could have anything that he wanted. As he grew older he became more and more unhappy. His stuff no longer satisfied him. There was an empty place in his life that only God's love could fill.

He tried to find happiness. Once he gave all the money in his pockets to a homeless man. That was a good thing to do, but it did not make him happy. He joined the army. He worked hard to fix broken church buildings. But nothing gave him peace and joy.

Then one day he was walking in the woods. He heard noises that he had heard before, but this time he stopped to listen. The birds were singing, and he thought, "They are singing their praises to the Creator God." Then he heard the squirrels chattering, and the frogs croaking and even the crickets had joined the others in their song of praise to the God who made them. And the flowers, and trees, and grass. Francis knew that flowers cannot sing, but it seemed to him that even flowers and grass became part of a great choir praising God. His heart was so full of joy that he started to sing with them. And he was happy. He was alive in a wonderful world that God had made, loves, and takes care of. He even wrote a song about it: "All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing."

We don't have to go for a walk in the woods to be like Francis of Assisi. The bushes in front of your house, or the flowers in the garden, or the plant in the flower pot are all part of God's wonderful world. And if you listen carefully the way Francis heard the crickets sing, you may just hear the flowers sing: "God made us. He loves us. He takes care of us," just like God loves and takes care of you and me.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? (an inter-active message)

There is something that each one of us has. I have one. So do you. In fact everybody in the entire world has one. Each of us has a name. Some people have more than one name. They not only have their real name, but they also have a name by which other people call them. That's called a nick-name, like the man whose real name was Clarence, but everybody called him "Squeak." Even when he was older they still called him "Squeak." Or there was the girl whose real name nobody seemed to know. They just called her "Sis" and she was still called "Sis" when she was all grown up. Those are nick-names.

What about you? Does anybody here have a nick-name: a name that is not your real name, but for some reason that's what people call you?

OK. Now let's think about God's names. God has lots of names. Can you think of one of God's names? Like the Lord's Prayer: "Our (what) in heaven." Or "The Lord is my (what).

Can you think of other names for God?

God's names are special because each one of them tells us who God is and what he does. Father. Shepherd. Friend. Comforter. Savior. All of those names tell us that God loves us and takes care of us.

A man in the Bible had a strange name. His name was "Theophilus" (Acts 1:1). Most people probably called him "Ted," or "Theo," or maybe even "Phil." Theophilus. But it was a very special name. The name Theophilus means "Lover of God."

So whatever your real name is, or whatever your nick-name might be, I hope that each one of you can also be called Theophilus, "Lover of God."

BROKEN

Most stories have happy endings. And that is why we like to tell them and we like to hear them. But every once in a while there is a story with a sad ending. We need to hear that kind of story too. And here is one: a very sad story. It goes like this:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Isn't that sad? Humpty was an egg, right? And smart eggs know better than to sit on a wall. So OK, he made a mistake, he fell and broke into a sloppy mess. It was such a mess that all the King's horses and all the King's men could not put Humpty together again.

There are other things that break, but usually they can be fixed and put back together again. Maybe you played too rough with a toy, and it broke. Sometimes that can be fixed or put back together again with "superglue."

And what happens when somebody falls and breaks an arm? That arm is broken, right? But it can be fixed. All the good doctors and all the kind nurses are able to put that arm back together again.

So Humpty was broken. Toys and bones can be broken. But there is something else that can break. Our heart can break. Not really, of course, because our heart keeps pumping blood through our body. But there are times when the love in our hearts seems broken in half. For example, let's suppose that you did something really, really bad. When your mother asked you about it you lied and said, "I didn't do it." But she found out that you did. She might have said to you, "When you lied to me that broke my heart." The best way to fix her broken heart is to say, "I'm really sorry. I'll try never to do that again."

But now your heart hurts because you know you did wrong. The best way to fix that kind of broken heart is to pray that God will forgive you and take away the hurt. And he will do that because what all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot do, God can. He can put broken hearts back together again and give us hope.

MRS. HUBBARD'S NEED

Everything that is alive needs to eat. Flowers need good soil. Horses need oats. People need food. But some people don't have enough food to stay healthy and strong, like Mrs. Hubbard. Do you remember the story? It goes like this:

Old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard
To fetch her dog a bone.
But when she got there the cupboard was bare.
So her poor dog had none.

If Mrs. Hubbard did not have enough to feed her dog she probably did not have enough to feed herself either. It also seems that she did not have enough money to go to the store to buy some food, so she and her dog had nothing to eat.

Now if you lived next door to Mrs. Hubbard, and you knew that her cupboard was bare, you would probably take over a can of soup or a box of cereal and some milk, and something for her dog. Maybe your mother or father would ask her to do some cleaning in your house, or weed the garden, or wash some windows so that she could earn some money to buy food for herself and her dog. And those would be good and kind things to do.

There are people like Mrs. Hubbard all over the world. Their stomachs growl because they are so hungry. Their cats meow and their dogs whine because they have no food. People need to eat to stay alive so sometimes people whose cupboard is bare look in other people's garbage cans or poke around in dumpsters behind restaurants to hunt for something to eat. It is really quite sad.

Surely you can't bring a can of soup to all those who are poor and hungry, but there are people who go to places where hunger is really a problem. Maybe they start to help by giving the hungry a food basket, but then they show them how to plant a vegetable garden, or teach them how to fish, or help them get a job so that they will be able to have enough food for their families.

It is exactly what Jesus wants us to do. He told us to feed the hungry and help the needy. We can be part of that work by helping with money, and by praying for the hungry people of the world; and by praying for those who are trying to help them.

BUBBLES

Bubbles. Bubbles here. Bubbles there. Bubbles in the bathtub. Bubbles in the sink. Bubbles in the fish tank. Blowing bubbles at a party. A girl might sometimes be given the nickname “Bubbles” because she is always so happy and excited. She just seems to bubble over.

It is sad that some people seem to want to live in a bubble. They wish that there was a bubble big enough so that they could crawl inside and not have to bother with anybody or anything. Of course, that would not work because if there could be a bubble big enough, as soon as someone tried to crawl inside the bubble would pop.

Many years ago there was a man who probably wished that he could live in a bubble. His name was Simon. Simon felt that the people of the world were very wicked, and he wanted to get away from all that wickedness. So he found a stone pillar and built a platform on the top of it and that is where he sat, away from the wicked world. Boys from a nearby village would come with food. They would climb up the pole to give the food to Simon.

Before long people came from all over to see this strange man sitting on top of a pillar. So he had to get a higher pole to get farther away from people. His first pillar was about as high as a basketball net. The last pillar that he used was about as tall as a telephone pole. People would put food for him in a pail and he would pull it up by a rope. The only time he took a shower was when it rained.

History says that Simon sat on a pole for 36 years, convinced that God would be pleased with what he was doing.

The Bible says that Simon was wrong. So are we if we try to get away from everybody and not be friends with anybody. God made us to enjoy each other. People need people.

So don't wish for a bubble so that you won't be bothered by other people. And don't try to sit on a pole. God wants us to enjoy our family and our friends. He wants us to love our neighbors and help those who are lonely. It's much better to be “people people” than “bubble people.”

WALKING BIBLES

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem most countries were ruled by powerful kings and emperors. The only laws in those countries were whatever the king wanted. If the king said, “I am your god. You must worship me,” that was the law. If he said, “You must give me all your money,” that was the law. The people had to obey or they were punished. There were no laws to protect the people.

That’s the way it was except in the country of Sparta where Lycurgus was the ruler. He was a good king. He wanted laws that would be good for all the people. The only problem was that there were no books in which to write the laws. And even if there had been books it would not have helped because the people of his land had never learned to read. So Lycurgus told his laws to the people. He gave speeches. The children had to learn his laws. He asked all the people to tell his laws to their family and friends and neighbors. He wanted the people to say his laws out loud to each other until everybody knew the laws of Lycurgus.

Those laws became so well known that they were in the heads and hearts of all the people in the land. When a visitor from another country came to visit, and he went charging down the road with his horse and chariot, the people would stop him and say, “The law of Lycurgus says that you went too fast. You must go more slowly.” And when somebody stole a loaf of bread from the grocery store, somebody would say, “The law of Lycurgus says that you must not steal.” Really, the people of that land knew the laws of Lycurgus so well and talked about them so much that they were like “walking law books.”

That is why we tell Bible stories like the one about Daniel, and the stories of Christmas and Easter, over and over again. That is why we have church school and sermons and we read the Bible. Christians want to know the Bible so that we can talk about it with each other and tell others the wonderful story of Jesus and his love.

We will never be “walking law books” in the land of Lycurgus, but we can be “walking Bibles” right where we live.

OLD MR. ONE TOOTH

This is a story about Old Mr. One Tooth. Nobody seemed to know his real name, but he was old and he had only one tooth. So they called him “Old One Tooth.” He lived on one of the islands way out in the Pacific Ocean.

When he was young a Christian missionary came to his island with the story of Jesus and his love. He also taught One Tooth how to read. The only book he had was a Bible that the missionary had given him. So as he grew up he read the whole Bible again and again, until he knew exactly where all the Bible stories could be found.

When he was old he moved to another island where there was a hospital. It was not very fancy, but a doctor and nurse were there to help the sick people. The hospital did not have a furnace, only a couple of fire places and a wood stove. One Tooth got the job as a wood cutter. He would chop wood for the hospital.

Each day when he finished chopping wood, he went to the waiting room where people sometimes had to wait a long time to see the doctor. There he would ask, “Would you like me to read a story?” Most people had not learned to read, so they always said, “Please.” And One Tooth would read a story from the Bible. It was the first time that many of those people heard about Jesus.

As One Tooth got older it became harder to see the words. His eyes hurt. The doctor examined him and told him that he was going blind. And that is what happened.

But do you think blindness stopped One Tooth from telling the stories of the Bible? No way. Only now when he went to the waiting room he did not ask, “May I read you a story?” He rather asked, “May I tell you a story?” They always said “Yes,” and from his memory he always did.

With the love of Jesus in his heart and knowledge of the Bible in his head Old One Tooth was always ready to tell the story of God who so loved the world that he sent his Son Jesus to be the Savior for all who believe.

Good for One Tooth. Good for us if we do the same.

WEBSTER'S ROPE

Once upon a time a spider lived high on one of the wooden beams near the roof of an old barn. His name was Webster. He had been born up there in the web that his father and mother had built. But as Webster grew older he became more and more unhappy. He loved to read, but up there it was almost too dark to read.

By the time Webster was all grown up, he decided to move. He looked down, and far below was a window. He decided that the window would be a good place to live. He would have enough light to read his spider books, and he would be able to see what was happening in the world.

So he started to spin a strand that he called his "spider rope." He attached it firmly to the wooden beam, and each day he made it a little longer. He figured if he made it long enough he might be able to swing over to attach himself to the window.

And that is exactly the way it went. When the spider rope was long enough, Webster very carefully climbed down to the end. Holding on tightly he began to swing. Each time he swung a little closer until finally he was able to reach out and attach himself to the window where he built a beautiful web.

Well, one day, after he had lived there for a while, he was sitting in his rocking chair munching on a fly that he had caught in his web when he looked up and saw the spider rope that had started his web. He wondered to himself, "What good is that doing? I don't need that anymore." So he crawled to the edge of his web and gnawed at the rope until it broke.

And then it happened. His web fell down and Webster with it. You see, that spider rope had been holding the web in place all those days and now that it was broken, Webster lost the very thing that kept him safe.

That is what prayer does. Prayer is our "spider rope" that connects us to God. As long as prayer is an important part of our life, God's love holds us strong and safe. If we ever stop praying, our connection to God is broken. And that is not good.

So keep praying. Stay connected.

THE CHAIN OF LOVE

While he was on earth, Jesus said lots of wonderful things, like how much God loves us, and how God promises to take care of us, and how God is ready to forgive us when we do something wrong.

But once in a while Jesus said something that surprises us, like when he said that we should love ourselves. Really. According to Jesus we should be able to say, “I-love-me.” Jesus said it this way, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But look, if I am supposed to love you as I love me, then I have to love me, right?

So does that mean that you are supposed to walk around hugging yourself? Does it mean that each morning and each evening you look at yourself in the mirror and say “I love me,” and then give yourself a kiss in the mirror? Is that what Jesus meant? Of course not.

So what then? When Jesus said “Love yourself,” he was saying, “God made you, and God does not make junk, so you are God’s precious possession. Take good care of yourself. Eat the right food. Run and play to exercise the muscles God gave you. And when you do not feel well, take your medicine.” Surely Jesus also meant that you should love yourself so much that you want to live forever. So love Jesus and one day you will live with him in heaven forever and ever.

But remember how Jesus said it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus wants us to love others at least as much as we love ourselves. Do you want others to be kind to you? Be kind to them. Do you want others to play with you? Play with them. If you fell and hurt yourself you would want somebody to help you. Do the same for them. And if they don’t love the Jesus who loves you, tell them that Jesus loves them too.

It’s a chain, isn’t it: a chain of love. Link one: “Love yourself.” Link two: “Love each other at least as much as you love yourself.” Link three: “Love God who says that you should love others as you love yourself.”

Link four: you are able to do all that loving because God first loved you and showed you what real love is when he sent Jesus to be your Savior.

GOD'S AMAZING WORLD

Let's think about some amazing things in God's amazing world. Like the grasshopper with its big and powerful back legs. The grasshopper is such a powerful jumper that if you were a grasshopper and had the same powerful legs as a grasshopper you would be able to go from one end of a football field all the way to the other end in just three giant hops. Isn't that amazing?

Or think of the polar bear, that big bear with white fur. Most polar bears live way up north where there is lots of ice. These bears spend a lot of time walking on the ice to search for their food. If you had to spend all day on the ice without boots, your feet would get awfully cold and probably would even freeze. But that is not a problem for the polar bears because they have fur on the bottom of their feet.

For something else that is truly amazing, think of the ant. People who know about these things say that the little ant crawling on the ground is the strongest creature in the world. In fact, if you were an ant and had the strength of an ant, you would be able to lift and carry almost 1,000 pounds. And if your mother and father were ants they would be able to lift and carry a car in each hand. That is how strong they would be if they had the strength of an ant.

One more amazing thing and that is your heart. We usually don't think too much about our heart, but it is there, in your body, pumping blood through your body. If it would ever stop working, you could not live any longer. And this is the amazing part: that heart pumps blood through your body about 70 times every minute. That is four thousand two hundred times an hour, and more than ten million times each day. And it keeps right on going, day and night, for as long as you live. You and your heart are amazing.

The most amazing part of all is the fact that grasshoppers, polar bears, ants and all the rest are held in the hand of a powerful and loving God. And that is exactly where you are with your beating heart. You are in the hands of God who loves you.

THE SAND CRAB

Once upon a time a sand crab had two homes: a winter home in the village and a summer home at the beach. Each spring he would travel to his home at the beach, and each fall he would travel back to his home in the village. He always took the same path, never one inch to the left or one inch to the right. He did that so many times that he actually began to think that the path belonged to him, and to nobody else.

One spring on his way to the beach he discovered that during the winter months someone had put a telephone pole right in the middle of his path. “Does man think,” he growled, “that he can move me out of my path? No way.” So he scratched and clawed his way up the telephone pole, rested a minute, and then carefully let himself down the other side.

But a little ways down his path there was another telephone pole. And then another, and another. Stubbornly he climbed each one. But he was also becoming more and more angry.

He finally arrived at his home at the beach. It was already late in the season. He did not have a very good summer that year. All he could think about was that long trip back to his winter home. That whole summer his anger made him a very crabby crab.

Finally September came, and he began the trip back to the village. He came to the first pole, looked at it, and became so angry that that his eyes popped out and his whole body became quite red with anger. But slowly, painfully he climbed to the top. He was tired. He could not even think of going down the other side, and then all those other poles as well. He just sat there on top of the telephone pole, too stubborn and too angry to climb down. So he sat there, and sat there some more. And one day, up there on that pole, he died of old age.

The Bible says, “Don’t go to bed while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). The Bible also says that when we are angry it is not only hard to pray, but anger also makes it hard to live with the kind and loving heart that pleases God (James 1:19).

After-Word

The Bible is God's revelation of himself and his plan for the coming of his kingdom in a broken world. It follows, therefore, that every sermon, message, lesson, or devotional that is based on the Bible should expose some aspect of who God is, what he does, and how that relates to us and our need for his redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

That conviction has motivated this collection. In some of these messages the person, work, and will of God is clearly stated. In others that message is more subtly told. But the purpose in each of them is to bring children into the presence of our living and loving God.