



BASED ON A TRUE STORY BOOKS

JJM Staff and Volunteers,

What an honor it is to serve you as you minister to teens in very tough places. Your commitment and passion for lost teens is truly inspiring! Our prayer is that these books will be a help to you as you connect young people to the Father.

Blessings!

Eric Kelly and the National JJM Leadership Team.

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About Based On A True Story Books:

This book includes 14 real teen stories that correspond to a story from the Bible. Covering topics like Pain, Conflict, Death, Excuses, & Forgiveness, each topic is designed to spark thought & give practical application. Written at a 3rd grade reading level.

GIVE LIFE TO YOUR STORY™

God's Love

"God's love makes me free"

JP's Story

JP sat and counted the bricks in the wall. He was bored out of his mind but had to sit in church once a week since he was living with his Grandma. He called her "G" just to bug her but she didn't seem to mind. The guy on stage kept talking about Jesus and love but JP kept counting bricks. He was bored. Sure, this old man could believe that God is love and that Jesus loves him. He was probably a good preacher-man who finished school and never hurt anybody.

JP felt different. He'd been on his own since 3rd grade. He already had a record. He'd pissed off enough teachers to be in Saturday school for a year. Sure, his mom was alive but she slept most of the day and was gone by the time he got home. And now she was gone for good. JP was on his own and this Preacher's love talk was not part of his world.

The Preacher sat down and some new guy stood up with and electric guitar and played a church song. People stood up so when G gave JP the eye he stood up too, but he wasn't singing. He kept counting bricks as people around him sang about how the love of Jesus saved them and the love of Jesus made them free. He heard the words of the song and felt confused because JP never felt free. People were always after him. Guys in his neighborhood wanted him to party with them. Teachers wanted him to do better in school. His mom used to be on him to get a job so he could help pay rent. He wasn't free from anything. JP felt trapped by the things he'd done wrong and all of the people who wanted something from him. As he looked at the bricks in

the old church walls he thought to himself, "I feel like I'm in prison. I don't feel free at all".

God's Story

John 8:3-11 (New International Version)

In the Bible there is a story about a woman who got caught having an affair with a man. In those days it was against the law to have affairs. The punishment for women was death. This woman was about to be killed by stoning. Men from the village grabbed her and dragged her to the town center and got ready to kill her. She was not free.

Jesus was teaching in the temple. The men pulled the woman to Jesus. "She's been caught having an affair. The Law says we can stoner her to death. What do you say Jesus?"

As the crowd gathered around her she fell down on her knees. She was probably crying. Maybe she was protecting her body, knowing that rocks were about to come at her. She felt trapped. She didn't feel free at all.

The Bible says that Jesus didn't argue with these men who accused the woman of her sin. Instead, Jesus got down on his knees and wrote words in the dust.

Imagine what it looked like;

- A crying woman about to die...
- A crowd of angry men ready to punish her...
- Jesus: kneeling down near the woman, drawing in the dirt.

The Bible says that when they kept on questioning him, Jesus straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without

sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” And then he stooped down and wrote on the ground again.

When the men hear Jesus say this they began to go away one at a time, until Jesus was left with the woman still standing there. As the people left, Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Women, where are they? Has no one convicted you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I convict you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Jesus didn’t judge her. He loved her! Even though she had done wrong and deserved a punishment, Jesus wanted her to be free. She must have felt guilty and alone and trapped by the crowd and by her own sin. Jesus loved her and wanted her to be free. His words made the angry crowd think about their own sin and they left her alone.

And then Jesus said to her, “You are free. Now don’t go back to your old life of sin.”

- Sometimes we feel trapped by loneliness.
- Sometimes we feel trapped by all the pressures life brings.
- Sometimes we feel trapped by our own sin; the stuff we have done wrong that deserves punishment.
- When do you feel trapped?

So What?

God loves you and wants you to be free. But just like he didn’t want the lady to go back into the affair, Jesus doesn’t free us so we can keep messing up. He frees us so that we can trust in him and have a friendship with him.

If Jesus were talking to you when he said, “Go and leave your life of sin,” what would he want you to stop doing? What sin do you need to leave behind so you can stay free?

JP had a hard time understanding that God’s love could make him free because JP felt trapped by his life. He’d blown it with the law. He’d messed up at school. His family left him with the only person who seemed to care, “G”. But as he stood there next to her and listened to her sing a church song he thought, “She is free. Everybody left her and her life has been as hard as mine, but she feels free. I want to be free too.”

Pain

Job 1 and 2

Jason’s Story

Leukemia. The word filled all the space in the doctor’s office. Jason heard his mom cry out, yet all he could do was stare straight ahead at the doctor. Leukemia. How could he, the star of the football team, a leader in his youth group, a straight-A student, a good son and brother have leukemia? Why would God punish him like this? Losing his dad last year was bad enough, how could God let his family suffer more?

Jason lay in his bed and stared at the ceiling. Tomorrow he would go to the hospital and begin a week of treatment. He tossed and turned and cried out to God. “Why God? Why me? I have been doing everything right. There are far more messed up kids at my school, why do I get punished like this?”

After Jason got done yelling at God, he suddenly thought, “Why not me?” No one, not even God, ever told him that life would be perfect. Was there someone who deserved Leukemia? Jason thought back to the story in the bible about a man named Job.

He had read the story and remembered that Job was a good man too. He didn't deserve all the hard things that happened to him, but he got through it by trusting God.

Job's Story

Job was a very rich man. He owned a lot of animals, had many children, was respected by everyone, and loved God. God was very happy with how deeply Job loved him and how kind Job was to others.

Satan, God's enemy, was not happy with Job. He doesn't want anyone to honor God or do what is right. Satan went to God and said that Job only loves you because of what you give him. If Job's life wasn't perfect, he wouldn't follow you.

God was sure that Job's trust was real and not just based on having a good life. God told Satan he could put Job to the test. God said that he would allow Satan to take away anything that Job had, but he could not hurt Job himself.

Soon after, one of Job's servants came to him and told him that thieves had come and stolen all of Job's donkeys and oxen. Then another servant ran in and told Job that lightning had killed all of his sheep and the shepherds who took care of them.

Then a third servant came and told Job that all his camels had been stolen also. All of Job's valuable animals were gone.

Next a servant arrived and told Job that all his children had been killed when a desert storm blew down his house.

Job had now lost all of his money, his house, and his children. As sad as he was, Job did not blame God.

Job said, "I was born with nothing. Everything I had, was given to me by God. Now he has taken it away. I will still praise him."

God was proud of Job and told Satan, "My servant Job has stood the test." But Satan said that is only because you have not allowed me to hurt him. If he is ill, he will no longer praise you.

To prove Satan was wrong, God told him that he could bring illness on Job, but he could not kill him.

Soon Job's whole body was covered in sores. He was in extreme pain and did not know what to do. Job's wife lost faith in God. "It's all God's fault" she cried. "Be quiet" Job told her. "You are talking nonsense. We are glad when God gives us happy times. We should be patient when we have trouble."

Job's friends were shocked by the troubles in Job's life. They soon began to tell him that he must have done something to make God mad. They thought Job's pain must be punishment from God.

But God knew that he loved God and had done nothing wrong. His friends thought he was lying and told him to ask God to forgive him. Job was sad that his friends did not believe him and told them they are no longer friends.

After losing his friends, Job began to feel that maybe God was being unfair. He asked God why he was having so many troubles. A young friend stepped forward and said to Job, "Look at the stars in the sky. Think how great God is. Do you really think that a God that big cares about whether you are good or bad?"

Suddenly a storm came and lightning and thunder crashed across the sky. Out of the storm, God spoke to Job: "You have been asking me all kinds of questions. But you must answer my questions to you."

“Where were you when I made the world? Were you there when the stars were formed or when I set the limits for how far the ocean waves could go? Can you tell me where the light comes from and where I keep snow and ice? Are you able to make rain fall or give life to plants and animals? Can you teach birds to fly? Answer me Job.”

Job had nothing to say to God. He felt guilty that he had questioned God. He had lived a good life and followed God’s laws, but he felt he had the right to argue with God. He had thought e could understand everything God did.

God did not explain why Job had lost everything, but he did make Job realize that he could trust God to do what was right. Job realized that he never really knew God before, he only knew what others had told him about God. Now that God had spoken to Job, he knew how wonderful God was.

God told Job’s friends that they had done wrong. They had not been good friends to Job and they had not spoken the truth to him. He also told them that he would forgive them because he knew Job would pray for them. Job forgave his friends and did pray for them.

Then God healed the sores on Job’s body and made him rich again. He even gave Job more children. God gave back to Job everything he had lost and Job lived to a very old age.

Connecting

Do you have troubles in your life that you don’t understand? It is easy to feel sorry for yourself and blame God for your problems. As we see in the story of Job, it is a mistake to measure how much God loves you by how good your life is going. The truth is, God loves you right now to the fullest. There is nothing you

can do to make Him love you more or less. He created you and He loves you.

So why does God allow pain in our lives if he loves us? As human beings, we can never totally understand the way God’s works, but we can trust that because He loves us, God will always do what He thinks is best for us. God never hurts us, but sometimes He allows pain in our life so that we can learn. We live in a broken world of messed up people. God gives us the choice to follow him or not. Often the pain in our life is cause by other people who aren’t following God. Instead of preventing the pain, God steps in and uses the pain for his good. Because he loves us, we can trust that God will heal our pain and use it for the best in our life. It may take time, but we can always see God’s hand in the hard times in our life.

Jason decided he would trust God no matter what happened in his life. He would wait for God to use this pain for good.

God did use Jason’s pain for good. He got better and helped nine of his friends start to trust Jesus. One of his friends shared something he read with Jason.

“God whispers through pleasures, but shouts trough pain.” (CS Lewis)

Jason heard God loud and clear in his pain.

So What?

What troubles or pain are you facing right now in your life? Are you blaming God for them? Have you told God? Job was honest with God and you can be too. God can take it. Go ahead, tell him about the problems in your life. Ask him to help you see the good the he is bringing. Then watch and trust that

God will take care of the troubles and teach you something good.

While you are waiting for God to work, think about the good he has done in your life. Think about his creation, what he has given you, how he has shown his love. The best way to be patient in the hard times is to remember the good parts of life that God has given you. As Job said, "We are glad when God gives us happy times, we should be patient when there is trouble."

Excuses

John 5:1-15

Tracy's Story

Tracy wanted to help her Grandma. After all, her Grandma had been the one person in Tracy's Life that she could depend on. Tracy's mom was always busy with her boyfriends and her dad was long gone, but her Grandma never let her down.

Grandma was getting old and had more and more trouble walking the short distance to the grocery store. She stooped over and sometimes used a walker, but she still made the trip every afternoon. She had to buy food everyday since they had no refrigerator to keep it fresh.

Tracy offered almost everyday to walk to the store or carry the bags, but Grandma always said no. She told Tracy, someday you won't be here and who will I depend on then? I am better off doing this on my own.

It made Tracy cry to watch her Grandma walk in pain. Why did she have to be so stubborn? Why can't she just accept my help?

Tracy's Grandma had been let down too many times in her life. Now she uses that as her excuse to not let anyone help her. She continues her painful daily trip, alone.

God's Story

In a town called Jerusalem, there was a pool that had healing powers. Day after day, people who were unable to walk, would lay by the pool. At certain times, the water would be stirred and the first person into the pool would be made well.

Jesus walked by the pool one day and watched a frustrated man who was trying to get into the pool. The man tried and tried, but he could never get into the water first and so he was not healed. Jesus knew that the man had been there a long time.

Finally, he said to the man, "Do you want to be healed?"

The sick man answered him by saying that he had no one to help him get into the pool so while he is trying someone else always gets there first

Jesus didn't care about the man's excuses. Instead he told him "Get up, pick up your bed, and walk."

The man stood up, picked up his bed and walked away.

There were some religious leaders nearby who saw the man was now walking around. They went to the healed man and told him that since it was the Sabbath, (the day of the week when no work was to be done in order to rest and worship God) it was wrong for him to be healed.

Then they asked him whom it was that had made him well. The man did not know it was Jesus and now the man who had healed him was nowhere around.

A little while later, the man went to the church, and Jesus found him there. Jesus told him, "You have been made well, go and sin no more."

The man went away and found the religious leaders and told them it was Jesus who had healed him. The leaders were mad since Jesus had broken the rules of the Sabbath. Jesus told them that his Father; God, was at work in people's lives every day and so was he.

Connecting

When Jesus asked the man at the pool if he wanted to be healed, the man made excuses and blamed others for his problem. Jesus didn't ask him why he wasn't getting in the pool, he asked him if he wanted to get well. Jesus didn't care about the man's excuses or who was to blame.

The religious leaders didn't like Jesus. His power made them mad. So, they made excuses for why Jesus was wrong. They didn't care about the man being helped, they just cared about their religious rules.

It is easy to make excuses but they can be very bad for us. We like to blame other people for our problems. Our problems may really have been caused by someone else's actions, but blaming them won't help make the problem any better.

What if, when the sick man had made excuses, Jesus said oh, ok well just keep trying to beat the others into the pool? The man would not have been healed. Jesus ignored how the man got the problem and just healed him.

Are you ever like the man at the pool? Do you sit around making excuses? Those excuses keep you from moving forward. What if, instead of blaming others for your life, you decided to

change your life? You have no control over other people. In fact, the only part of life you can control is your own actions and decisions. Instead of being stuck because of what other have done to you, you can choose to do the things it will take to get your life back on track

Just like he said to the man, Jesus is asking you, do you want to be helped? Don't make excuses just answer him. IF you want to be helped, tell him and begin to do what he tells you to do. IF you don't want help, just keep making excuses

So What?

Try making a list (either in your head or on paper) of all the excuses you have used for why your life is the way it is right now. List all the people that you blame your problems on.

Now, let go of the list. Either clear it out of your head or, if you wrote it down, rip it up and throw it away. Walk away from the excuses.

Now imagine Jesus asking you if you want to be helped. Answer him honestly. Talk to him about what you would like him to change and then see what happens. You may not get instant change like the sick man did, but Jesus will help you.

If you have a friend that loves Jesus, Tell them about what you asked God to help you change.

Hopelessness

Acts 12:4-19

Kelly's Story

Kelly watched a balloon sore into the air. She wished she could be free like the balloon. Kelly wanted to float away and start life over. But she couldn't, she was stuck in a bad family and a bad relationship.

Kelly's mom had often hit her. Sometimes Kelly felt lie she deserved it, but sometimes the hitting came for no reason at all.

When Kelly met her boyfriend, Ray, she was sure life would be ok. Ray was sweet and seemed to really love her. Then one night they had a fight and Ray hit Kelly. She was so shocked that she ran home and told her mom. Her mom told her she probably made him mad and she deserved to be hit.

The next day, Ray said he was sorry and Kelly hoped once again that life would be ok.

The hitting kept going at home and with Ray. Now Kelly was stuck. She couldn't run away from home, she didn't have any money. She couldn't break up with Ray; he had already told her he would find her.

Kelly felt hopeless. Where could she go? How could she break free? Would life ever be ok?

One of Kelly's friends was always telling her she had to break up with Ray. She told her Jesus would take care of her. Kelly didn't see how even Jesus could free her. Was this how her whole life was going to be? Kelly felt hopeless.

Peter's Story

Peter was one of Jesus's closest friends. He spent a lot of time with Jesus before his death. After Jesus' death, Peter spent his life telling others about the love of God.

Peter was very brave because Christians were often beaten up or arrested for talking about Jesus. Peter did it anyway and was finally arrested.

Peter ended up in jail all because he would not stop telling others about Jesus.

One night Peter was in jail and chained between two guards while more men guarded the door to the cell.

While Peter was trying to sleep, a bright light appeared in the jail cell and an angel awoke Peter. "Quick, get up" the angel said to Peter. As the angel spoke, the locked chains on Peter's wrists and ankles fell off.

Then the angel told Peter to put on his clothes and shoes and to follow him. Peter followed the angel out of the prison, but had no idea what was going on. In fact, Peter thought he might be dreaming.

Peter and the angel walked past all the guards and came to the gate leading into the city. The locked gate opened automatically for them and they walked down the street of the city. Suddenly the angel was gone and Peter was left alone. One minute he was chained up in jail, totally hopeless and the next minute he was a free man.

Trust

Genesis 6,7,8,9

Lucas' Story

Lucas was scared. Yesterday, a block from school, one of his classmates had been shot and killed. Lucas knew it had to have been a gang fight and now there would be lots of people out for revenge. He knew what that felt like. Two years ago, he would have been hunting down people himself. Lucas had spent time in jail for his violent temper, but now he was trying to follow Jesus.

Lucas wasn't scared because of what he knew would probably happen on campus. He was scared because he knew Jesus was telling him to do something really hard. He wasn't sure how he knew, but somehow Lucas knew that he was supposed to stand in the middle of the quad at school and pray. It was a still small thought in his brain that now felt like a loud shout. God was telling him to pray, in the middle of the busiest place on campus during lunch today.

Lucas had fought the feeling all night but he knew he had to do it. God had done so much for him. Not only had he forgiven him, but he had worked out his problems with the police and given Lucas a new family to live with. For the first time in his life, Lucas felt loved and hopeful. He couldn't let God down now.

Slowly Lucas walked to the middle of the quad and in the midst of the crowd of students he knelt down and started to pray. After a few minutes Lucas looked up and realized there were five other students kneeling with him and they were praying also. People stopped and stared but no one joined, the prayers got louder. Soon there were twenty and then thirty and finally thirty-five students finished praying.

When they stood up, they thanked Lucas for having the guts to start prayer. They knew their campus needed it.

That was the start of a lunchtime prayer group that continued to meet twice a week for six years to pray. During those six years, the amount of violence on the campus grew much smaller. God used Lucas' trust in him to make a difference on a school campus, long after Lucas was gone.

Noah's Story

There came a time on the earth when God was unhappy with all his people. The people had forgotten how much God loved them, and had become evil and selfish. In fact, the bible tells us that God was sorry he had created human beings since they had become so evil.

One man on earth remained good and faithful to God, his name was Noah. Noah loved and trusted God. Noah's trust made God very happy.

God said to Noah, "I want you to make a big boat. I will tell you how to do it."

Noah, with the help of his sons, built the boat just as God told him to do.

As Noah worked on the boat, his neighbors gathered to watch. They made fun of Noah for wasting his time building a large boat when there was no water around. They didn't understand how Noah could trust God so much that he would build something so dumb. Often, while Noah and his friends worked, people would yell and laugh at them. Still Noah kept building.

Then God told Noah to gather two of every kind of animal and bird on the earth. So, Noah gathered the animals and plenty of food for all of them and led them onto the boat.

The boat building and the animal gathering took a long time and a lot of hard work, but Noah trusted God and did all that he said.

After all the animals and food filled the boat, Noah and his family went in also and then God closed the huge boat door.

After all the animals and food filled the boat, Noah and his family went in also and then God closed the huge boat door.

For six days, Noah and his family and all the animals lived in the boat with not a hint of rain or really understanding why God told them to build the boat. The neighbors stood outside laughing at Noah and telling him how stupid he was to build a boat when there was no rain or water.

Still Noah trusted God.

On the seventh day, the rain started. It rained and rained and rained. The people standing outside the boat suddenly wanted in with Noah. They didn't think Noah was so dumb now.

For 40 days and 40 nights, the rain fell from the sky. Soon water covered the whole earth. Every human and animal drowned. But Noah and his family and animals were safe and dry in the boat.

For many days, the boat floated on the water. Noah and his family were busy in the boat taking care of all the animals.

After 150 days, the water finally started to dry up and go down.

A few months later, Noah could finally see the tops of mountains again from his window in the boat.

One day, Noah sent a dove out to see if the bird could find dry land. But the earth was still covered with water so the dove flew back into the boat.

Noah waited seven more days and then sent the dove out again. This time the dove came back with a brand-new olive branch in its mouth. This was a sign that the bird had found a place where trees were above the water.

Seven days later, Noah sent the dove out again and this time it did not come back to the boat. He knew then, that the dove had found a dry place to land.

So the earth was completely dry. God told Noah it was time to leave the boat.

All of the animals and Noah's family were very happy to be out on God's clean earth.

Noah and his family built an altar to God and thanked him for keeping them safe.

God was happy with Noah's trust and the new earth. He promised Noah that he would never again send a flood to cover the earth. To show Noah that he meant what he promised, God made a big, beautiful rainbow in the sky. Noah was glad he had trusted God.

God uses all kinds of method to stop evil – even floods.

If you have a Bible, look at the story of Noah for yourself. In Genesis (The first book of the Bible) starting in chapter 6 and ends in chapter 9.

Connecting

The story of Noah is kind of hard to believe. Imagine there being only one person on the whole earth who was doing the right thing. Imagine God being so angry that he sent a flood to wipeout every living creature. Imagine trying to get an elephant

and a lion to walk onto a boat. Imagine being in a boat with a bunch of stinky animals for a year!

Even though the story may be hard to believe, it is true. So, what can we learn from the story of Noah and the big boat? Trust is very important to God. God loves us and wants us to trust him. We show him our trust when we obey. Noah was asked to do some very strange things. God told him to build a big boat when it seemed like there was no reason to need one. He told him to gather two of every animal and then to live on the boat for a very long time. Even when Noah's friends made fun of him, he still trusted God. Trusting God saved Noah and his family.

Trusting God is not easy. It's hard to trust him because we can't see him or sit down and have a dinner with God and have him explain everything.

Sometimes it is hard to trust God because everyone you have trusted in your life has let you down, so why would God be any different? In fact, one of the reasons you are in trouble right now might be because you trusted the wrong people.

God understands that trust is hard but he tells us in the Bible that when we trust God, it pleases him.

Remember, the God who asked Noah to build a big boat and save two of every animal, is the same God that wants you to trust him. If he can do the miracles he did in Noah's life, he can certainly do miracles in your life.

Next time you see a rainbow, remember God can be trusted with your life.

So what?

So, how can you start trusting God. Start small, try waking up every morning and telling God that you trust him and asking him to help you do the right things today.

How do you know what the right things are? We find this out in a few ways. First, talk to a friend you know who loves Jesus. (YFC staff or chaplain is a good start) Ask them to help you understand what the right things to do are in your life. Second, read the bible. The bible is God's Story and it helps us understand what the right things are by reading what others have learned.

Finally pay attention to your own feelings. Ever get the feeling that what you are doing just isn't right? That is God telling you that he wants to help you change your actions. God reminds you when you are making bad decisions, that he has other plans for you.

The New You

Luke 19:1-10

Michael's Story

Michael is lost and lonely. He has run away from his foster family for the fourth time and this time there is no way he is going back. It doesn't matter anyway, no one wants him. The only reason his foster mom will call the police is so she won't get in trouble, she doesn't care if Michael lives on the street.

Michael is sure he can take care of himself. Living on the streets will be better than living in that house or his own mom's home or even the jail he lived in for nine months.

Michael is pretty sure he doesn't need anyone. Every adult in his life has let him down, all he really needs is a place to sleep tonight. Tomorrow he will steal some food and figure out how to get some money. It will be better to be on his own.

As he wanders the street looking for a place to spend the night, Michael sees a light on in an old church. The sign says "Soup Kitchen downstairs". Michael is starving and the idea of getting some food sounds too good to pass up. He hesitates one more time before going in. A church is not really where Michael wants to spend any time. He had heard all the religious talk he could handle from his grandma and the chaplain at the jail. They always told him that Jesus was with him, but it sure didn't feel like Jesus was with him on the streets tonight.

I can just ignore what they say about Jesus, eat quickly and get out, Michael thought to himself.

Inside were long tables with a few people huddled over hot bowls of soup. Michael could smell fresh bread and it looked like there was chocolate cake as well. He could hardly wait to have some.

He stood in line and a nice woman handed him a full bowl and a plate of bread and cake.

Michael chose a place in the corner where he could eat alone. Just as he emptied his bowl, a man came and sat across from him. Michael knew he must work at the church because he wasn't dressed like someone who lived on the street. He told Michael his name was Dan and asked him if he wanted more soup. Michael, didn't want to stay too long, so he said no and started in on the cake.

Dan asked Michael about his life and how long he had been homeless. No mention of Jesus, so Michael felt it was safe to

keep talking. As Michael told Dan more about his life, he was surprised at how good it felt to tell someone all the bad stuff that had happened. Dan started telling Michael about his own life. He had lived on the streets when he was about Michael's age, he had done drugs, gone to jail, and broken his mom's heart because of his bad decisions.

Interested, Michael ask Dan how his life got better. "A friend helped me" was all Dan would tell him. "Come back tomorrow same time and I'll tell you more" Dan said he got up and walked away.

Michael did come back the next day and the next and the next and before long, Michael had met the friend Dan talked about. It was Jesus, not the Jesus he had heard lots of sermons on, but the Jesus who had forgiven Dan and helped him start a new life.

Before long, Michael had changed too. Jesus changed everything.

Today, Michael has a house and a wife who loves Jesus and he serves soup in the same church where he met Dan.

Zacchaeus' Story

Jesus is passing through a town called Jericho. Zacchaeus is a rich, tax collector who lives in Jericho. He is a very short man with very few friends. Zacchaeus is a hated man and though he is rich, he is lonely.

Tax collectors in those days had no one checking up on them. They often took more than people owed and kept the extra for themselves. Zacchaeus had cheated many people in Jericho.

The town of Jericho was preparing for a man named Jesus who would be passing through. They had heard he was a special man who taught about God's love. Zacchaeus wanted to see

Jesus; he wanted to know if Jesus was really special as people said. Zacchaeus needed a friend; maybe Jesus would be that friend.

One day, as Zacchaeus was collecting tax, he heard a shout from someone in town,

"Jesus is coming!" The townspeople called for their loved ones and friends to come and see this man they had heard about. Men, women, and children all came running to see Jesus as he passed by.

Zacchaeus, eager to see Jesus, ran to a tree by the side of the road and quickly climbed up its branches. He climbed as high as he could and when he looked down, he saw Jesus looking up at him. Jesus didn't just look at him, he shouted, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. I want to stay at your house today."

At my house, thought Zacchaeus. No one ever wants to come to my house and how does Jesus know my name?

Zacchaeus hurried down and took Jesus home for dinner.

The people of Jericho all started whining. "Jesus has gone to eat dinner with Zacchaeus, but everyone knows what a bad man Zacchaeus is. Why would Jesus eat with him?"

Zacchaeus kept listening to Jesus all through dinner and while he listened an amazing thing happened in his life. He decided to stop cheating the people of Jericho. Not only that but he told Jesus that he would pay back anyone he cheated four times more than he took from them. AND he would give half of all he owned to the poor.

Jesus, his new friend, was very happy.

Zacchaeus did just as he promised. He became a new person because of meeting Jesus. He was still short and rich but now he was also happy.

Check out Luke 19:1-10 in the Bible to read the story of Zacchaeus for yourself.

Connecting

There are few stories in the Bible where we see someone change as quickly as Zacchaeus did. His time with Jesus changed everything. That is exactly why Jesus came to earth, to find and save lost people. His love, compassion, and friendship are so powerful that people want to do the right things when he is a part of their life. The truth is Zacchaeus climbed out on the branch not just to see Jesus but because somewhere deep-down Zacchaeus knew he was lost and he really wanted to be found.

Jesus loved Zacchaeus whether he stopped cheating people or not.

Making Decisions

Proverbs 2

Kyle's Story

I'm Kyle. I've been going out with Keisha for six months. We're good together so we're gonna get an apartment and live together. I borrowed some cash from my dad for the first and last month's rent. I can't wait to get in my own place and start life with Keisha.

2 months later...

My dad is ticked at me because I haven't paid him back yet for the rent. I tried to get more hours at work but they're making

cutbacks. My teacher dropped me because I missed too many classes. Someone said they might kick me out of school. I'm looking for a second job.

5 months later ...

Keisha's gone. She knew we were going to lose the apartment so she moved in with some friends. She says she still loves me but I barely see her anymore.

1 month later ...

Life is really hard. I never paid my dad back and he's still ticked. Some of my friends let me sleep over but I usually stay in my car. I don't know what went wrong. All I wanted was a good life with Keisha.

Connecting

- What did Kyle want?
- What did Kyle do right?
- What would you do differently?

Jesus told a story about making good decisions. Jesus knew that there were forces and pressures in the world that made people confused.

- People wanted life to be easy.
- People wanted to keep their families safe.
- People wanted to succeed.

But sometimes it's hard to decide what's best. People often choose what's easiest. So Jesus talked about a wise man.

He said that if people listen to his teaching and if people obey what God says, they will be like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. When rain comes and the land floods, a house on a rock will stand strong and the people inside will be safe.

But if people ignore what Jesus says and they don't follow his example, they will be like a man who builds his house on sand. The waves come up and the sand moves. The water washes the sand away and the house falls apart. The people become homeless.

- What decisions do you make every day?
- What BIG decisions will you make in your future?
- What do you think God wants you to do?

So What?

Maybe it's hard to know what God wants you to do. Maybe you are just getting to know Jesus and you don't know how to trust. God promises wisdom to YOU. God says that if you read the Bible and obey his commands, he will lead you, he will keep you safe and he will guide your decisions.

Read Proverbs 2. As you read, put your name in the empty lines.

Proverbs 2:1-13

1 _____, Listen to what I say,

And treasure my commands.

2 Tune your ears to wisdom,

And concentrate on understanding.

3 Cry out for insight,

And ask for understanding.

4 Search for them, as you would silver;

Seek them like hidden treasures.

5 Then _____ will understand what it means to fear the Lord,

And _____ will gain knowledge of God.

6 For the Lord grants wisdom!

From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

7 He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.

He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.

8 He guards the paths of the just

And protects those how are faithful to him.

9 Then _____ will understand what is right, just,
and fair,

And _____ will find the right way to go.

10 For wisdom will enter your heart,

And knowledge will fill you with joy.

11 Wise choices will watch over you.

Understanding will keep you safe.

12 Wisdom will save you from evil people,

From those whose words are twisted.

13 These men turn from the right way

to walk down dark paths.

14 They take pleasure in doing wrong,

And they enjoy the twisted ways of evil.

15 Their actions are crooked,

And their ways are wrong.

- What does line 3 say you should ask for?
- How hard should you search?
- What does line 6 say God gives?
- What does line 7 say God will give you if you are honest?
- What will God do for people who are faithful to him in line 8?
- Are there people in your life who enjoy the twisted ways of evil? What should you do?

Conflict

Matthew 18

Sometimes I have to work in the yard for my aunt. She puts me on "weed duty" which she thinks is funny 'cause I got thrown out of school for selling weed. Since she paid my bail and gave me a place to live; I work for her in the garden.

Some weeds act like they own the place. Their roots grow deep and they take forever to dig out. Other weeds have tiny roots but they spread out across the vegetables as if they have a million fingers. I see weeds everywhere I go. They grow in sidewalks, parking lots and football fields. Once I even started pulling weeds from the plants next to McDonald's!

So I had a fight with my aunt last week and it reminded me of the weeds. I thought everything was fine between us, like we were a good clean garden. But she said there were some "issues"...like weeds and we had to pull them out if we were going to stay healthy. Talking about our issues was going to be like pulling weeds. Maybe the roots would be deep and hurt. It's hard work, but if you want your garden to survive, you've got to pull the weeds.

- What kind of issues or conflicts have you faced with your family or friends?

- What do you do to solve them?
- What doesn't work for you when you are trying to solve a conflict?

God's Story

Jesus told a story about a king who wanted to settle loans he had given to his people. One man was brought before the king who owed a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn't pay the debt so the king ordered that the man and his whole family be sold into slavery in order to raise the money that was owed. The poor man fell on his knees and begged, "Please Sir! Give me a chance and I'll pay the money." The King was touched and decided to forgive the entire debt.

Shortly after that, the man who was forgiven by the king ran into a friend who owed him ten dollars. He grabbed the guy by the neck and yelled at him, "Pay me back!" The poor man had no money and he begged for some time to find the cash to pay back his friend. But he wouldn't do it. He had his friend arrested and put in jail until the money was paid back.

The king heard what had happened. He was furious at the man he had forgiven and he turned him over to the jailers to be punished until his debt was paid.

After Jesus told this story he explained that forgiveness is really important to God. God is like the king who forgives people even though they owe him tons.

Connecting

- How has God forgiven you?
- How do you feel about God's forgiveness?

Sometimes when we are having problems with other people it's because we can't forgive them. Anger pops up like weeds in a

garden. When you stay mad at people you can feel the weeds of rage growing in your soul.

THE BIBLE SAYS

- If we confess our sin o God he will totally forgive us. 1 John 1:9
- We must forgive other people as God has forgiven us. Colossians 3:13
- If we don't forgive other, God will treat us as the King treated his people (they went back to jail). Matthew 18:35

My aunt and I work conflict out daily. She promises to forgive me like God has forgiven her. I'm learning to forgive too, so I don't stay mad and, weeds don't take over.

So What?

Ask God to help you remember people you need to forgive. Even if they don't say they are sorry, you can still forgive them because God has forgiven you. God will help you.

Being Real

Matthew 26:6-13

Have you notice how people like to pretend they are important? We call them "posers" or "fakes". Lots of people act instead of being real.

- Why do you think people do this?

Adam's Story

There's a kid at school named Adam who had a major wipe out skateboarding. He was all bloody and there was gravel trapped under his skin. He didn't tell anyone but you could see scars on

his arms and it looked like he was getting worse. He ended up going to the hospital. Some of the dirt and gravel stuck in his skin got infected. The infection got in his blood and was moving toward his brain and heart. He almost died.

When he came back to school people asked him, "Dude! Why didn't you tell your parents in the first place?" He said he didn't want anyone to know how badly he was hurt. He didn't want to have to go to the doctors. He didn't want to have them put on medicine or give him a shot. So he pretended he was ok.

- Have you ever pretended you were ok even though you were hurt (You could be physically hurt or emotionally hurt)?

God's Story

There's a bible story about a woman who was known to be a sinner. Maybe she was a prostitute, maybe she was a thief. What we know for sure is that people knew she was bad. One day an important man invited Jesus to dinner at his house so Jesus and his friends went for a nice meal. While he was eating, the woman who was known as a sinner came in the room and bowed at Jesus' feet crying. The Bible says she cried so much she actually washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Then she poured expensive perfume on his feet.

The man who had invited Jesus to dinner said, "He must not know what a sinner she is!" But Jesus did know about the woman's like. So he said to the man:

"Simon, I have something to tell you."

The Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people - 500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them

both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I supposed the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her ears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume."

"I tell you, her sins - and they are many - have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

Connecting

Being real is important to Jesus. We need to be honest about who we really are; the good and the bad. Hiding bad stuff only leads to infection.

- What parts of the REAL you do you hide from other people?
- Why do you feel like you need to hide these parts of your life?
- Who might you trust with the REAL you?

Forgiveness

Exodus 2:11-14

Gabrielle's Story

Thursdays Gabrielle walks to work. Every other day she rides bus or gets a ride but Thursdays, rain or shine, she walks. It takes her twice as long and she gets to work already tired, but Thursday she walks, and she walks the long way. It's because of the doctor's office on Sunrise Avenue. Thursday's people line the street outside the doctor's office holding signs with pictures of babies that say, "Abortion is MURDER". Gabrielle can't look at that. It makes her sick. So Gabrielle always walks the long way on Thursdays.

She was 14 when she got pregnant. Her boyfriend loved her and even though they weren't together anymore, they were still friends. But her mom told her, "No way," and the doctor said her body wasn't ready to carry a baby so she made the appointment and got it taken care of. Everybody said she did the right thing.

Thursdays she walks three extra blocks so she doesn't have to see those people and their signs. She doesn't want to be reminded of what she did. She didn't break any laws but she still feels bad. She feels loss. She feels guilt. So she keeps walking the long way.

- Have you done something that you feel bad for?
- Have you wanted to run away from the memory of what you did?

Moses' Story

There's a story in the Bible about Moses. When Moses lives in Egypt he saw a lot of slaves being treated badly. It is in Exodus chapter 2.

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. (They were slaves and the Egyptians were their masters.) He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw to Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting you fellow Hebrew?"

The man said, "Who mad you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

Moses knew killing that Egyptian was wrong, even though he was doing it to protect a slave. He must have felt confused with anger and guilt and sadness spinning in his head.

So Moses ran! He left the comfort of his expensive home in Egypt and ran to the desert. Like Gabrielle, He didn't want to think about what he had done. He just wanted to get away so he went all the way out into the middle of the desert where no one knew him and he got a job as a shepherd. Moses stayed there for more than 40 years.

- Imagine leaving your life and running somewhere far away.
- Imagine starting your life all over with a new home, a new job and new people.
- Would you be able to forget your past?

One day when Moses was out in the desert watching his sheep, God talked to him. God appeared as a bush that was on fire but

not burning up into ashes. God told Moses to come up close and take off his shoes and Moses did. Then God told Moses that he had to go back to Egypt and rescue all the slaves because God loved them and wanted them free. And God wanted to use Moses for this important job.

- Why would God use a man who had murdered to do this important job?
- Do you think God wants YOU to do something important for Him?

If you read Moses' story (It's in the Bible chapter of Exodus, Chapter 2) you will find a man who loved God but still made a lot of mistakes. Even though he murdered a man, God wanted to have a friendship with Moses.

- God didn't want Moses to avoid his past.
- God didn't want Moses to hide from God.

So What?

Have you been hiding from God because of things you have done wrong? Are you ready to tell God that you are sorry?

Have you been avoiding people because of things you have done wrong? Are you ready to tell those people that you are sorry?

Start right now by writing a note to God. He wants you to be close to Him. He doesn't want you to hide. If you don't want to write it, just imagine what you would say.

Dear God...

Family

Genesis 4

Tricia's Story

"Family", I hate that word Tricia thinks to herself as she reads the poster at church. "Bring your whole family to the church barbeque." The words brought tears to Tricia's eyes. She didn't have a family to bring, at least not one that she could bring to church. Sure she had a family but she never knew exactly which ones would be there when she walked in the door. Would it be her "nice" father who told her she was pretty or the mean one that showed up after too many beers and told Tricia that no one would ever love her? Her mom could only be counted on when she ran out of money for drugs and had to come home to beg for more. Tricia's brother tried to take care of her but he had his own kids to worry about. Another brother in jail and a sister who mostly lived with her friends rounded out the family.

Many nights Tricia lay awake begging God to give her a real family, like her friends had. If only she could just live in a real house with a real yard and people that loved her and cared what she ate and if she got her homework done or not.

Why did some people get good families and some, like Tricia, get messed up ones? Didn't God care about her? If only she could go to the barbeque without a family, maybe she could find people who would at least let her pretend to be a part of their family. If only God would give her a new family.

Adam & Eve's Story

Adam and Eve (the first man and woman God made) had two sons named Cain and Abel. Cain, the older one, grew up and

became a farmer. Abel, became a shepherd. (took care of sheep)

The boys were taught to love and follow God. One day, the two young men decided to bring presents to offer to God. Cain brought some of the best corn from his fields. Abel brought a newborn lamb from his flock of sheep. God looked at the beautiful gifts they brought and then he looked at the two boys themselves. He saw the kind of people they were on the inside. God knew that Abel loved and trusted him, so he accepted Abel's gift. He also knew that on the inside, Cain was proud and selfish and so he did not accept Cain's gift.

This made Cain very angry. God asked Cain why he was so mad. God told him this was his own fault. It was his choice to be the way he was. God told Cain that he was worried that Cain's selfish heart would cause him to do evil. Cain walked back to his fields mad and hateful. He hated Abel because he was good and made God happy. He was jealous of his brother and seeing Abel's happy face only made him angrier.

Cain decided he would get even with his brother for being the good one and getting all the attention. One day he asked Abel to go for a walk with him. Abel was hoping Cain would want to be friends again and so he agreed to walk with him. As they walked, Cain's jealousy and anger got out of control. Cain suddenly turned on his brother and killed him with one powerful punch. It was all over in a moment and Cain quickly ran away and left his brother's body.

But Cain could not run from God. God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain replied, "How should I know, am I supposed to look after him all the time?"

God answered, "Cain how could you do this?" Cain knew the God knew what he had done to Abel. God knew about the hatred and jealousy that Cain had in his heart.

God told Cain that all his fields would dry up and he would no longer be able to live as a farmer. He would become homeless and have to wander for the rest of his life as a punishment for killing Abel.

Cain cried out that the punishment was too much. He complained that when others found out what he had done they would kill him. God promised Cain that his life would be hard but he would not let anyone kill him.

So Cain left his farm and his home. He also left God. He had been too proud to listen to God's warning and his jealousy and anger had caused him to kill his only brother. Cain's life was ruined.

Connecting

The story of Cain and Abel is the first story of a messed up family. There are other stories in the bible of messed up families but few are as sad as Cain and Abel

When Cain killed Abel, God was not surprised. He knew that because of sin (anything you do that is against what God says) Cain's anger could cause him to do him evil.

From the very beginning of time, God created families and planned for them to be safe, happy places for us. Unfortunately, because of sin, bad things happen in families.

Not all families are as bad as Cain and Abel's and some are much worse. We do know that no family is perfect but God still loves families.

God really does want our families to be loving places where we learn to respect and care for others. However, God is not surprised when families don't work the way he wants them to.

As bad as families can be, God can still fix them. He can mend broken relationships, help people forgive and heal, and he can change our hearts so that we are better able to love our family. He can even give us a new family to replace the one we may have lost.

In fact, God tells us in the bible that when we choose to follow him, he becomes our heavenly Father and adopts us into his family. Even when the family we were born into lets us down, God still loves us like a Father should and puts people in our life that can teach us how family is supposed to work.

So What?

Think about your family. If you can draw a picture of what your family looks like. If not, just think about these questions:

- What do you feel when you think about your family?
- Why do you love them?
- How do they make you angry or unhappy?
- How do you think your family feels about you?
- What do you think God thinks about your family?

As you think about your family, ask God to heal the problems that you see. Thank him for giving you a family and ask him to help you be better family member. Is there something you could do to help your family?

Now think about allowing God to be a real Father to you. Not a Father who loves you forever no matter what you do. Are you willing to trust God to be your perfect Father and to take care of you?

Tell Him!

Loyalty

1 Samuel 18-19

Pedro & Samuel's Story

A story is told of a little boy named Pedro who grew up in a small town in Mexico. Pedro had a friend named Samuel. Pedro and Samuel were best friends and played together everyday. Their families were very poor. In fact, Pedro and Samuel were often sent to the dump to dig for food or things that could be sold to make money for their families. Since they had no toys and often didn't get to go to school, Pedro and Samuel made up games to stay busy. Often after running and playing all day, they would sit down in the shade and make up stories to pass the time.

One day, Samuel began to feel sick and a few days later he was so ill he could not get out of bed. Samuel's mother cried and prayed for her sick son. Pedro would go to visit his friend, but always left very sad. Pedro heard Samuel's family say they thought Samuel might die; they must take him to the doctors who could help him.

Since Samuel's family was so poor, they had to travel a long ways to the free clinic where doctors could make Samuel well. Pedro went with his friend's family. They walked and carried Samuel for two days and finally reached the clinic.

The doctors said that Samuel was very sick and needed medicine and blood to get better.

The doctors had the medicine, but they didn't have new blood to give Samuel.

The family would need to have their blood tested and see if they matched Samuel's blood.

The doctors soon learned that Samuel's mother and Pedro had the right kind of blood. The nurse asked Pedro if he would lay very still on a table and let them take his blood out of his arm so they could put it into his friend Samuel.

Pedro said, "yes" right away. He would do anything to help his friend live.

As Pedro lay on the table, the nurse got the needle ready. She noticed that Pedro was crying and she had not even stuck the needle in yet.

She looked down and wiped away his tears, and asked Pedro if he was scared.

"No, I am not scared. I know it is best that I die so my friend can live. I am just crying because I will miss Samuel."

The nurse looked at Pedro and said, "Pedro, do you think you are going to die when I take the blood out of your arm?" "Yes" Pedro answered, "but it will be ok if Samuel lives."

"Oh Pedro", the nurse hugged him, "you will not die." "We are only taking a little blood out to give to Samuel. You will both be well."

Pedro's eyes got wide as he listened to the nurse. "You mean we can both live and be friends?"

"Yes" said the nurse as she wiped away tears. "Why are you crying?" asked Pedro, "if we will both be well?"

"I am crying because you were willing to give up your life for Samuel."

David & Jonathan's Story

David was a young shepherd boy when he first met King Saul. Saul liked David because he was a very good musician.

Whenever King Saul was sad or worried (which was often because he was not following God's ways) he would send of David to come and play his harp. The music always helped the King to feel better.

As David grew older, he learned to be a very good soldier in the King's army. Saul was glad to have such a brave and successful officer in his army. Until the day when King Saul learned that David had become more famous and popular than he was himself

As Saul and David would come home from battle, beautiful women would come out to greet them. They would sing, "Saul has killed thousands, but David has killed tens of thousands." Saul soon learned that others thought young David was an even better man than he was. Saul became very jealous and worried that the people would want to make David King.

One day, Saul lost control and as David played his music, Saul picked up a spear and threw it at him. David leaped to the side and the spear hit a wall.

Two more times Saul tried to kill David, but David always escaped. Even though the King was trying to kill him, David was not afraid. King Saul was afraid though. He knew it was God who had saved David. He knew God was with David and not with himself.

Saul continued to hate David but David had one true friend in the palace, the King's son, Jonathan. Jonathan was a very good soldier as well and he and David became very close friends. Surprisingly, David's popularity could ruin Jonathan's chances at

replacing his father as the next King, yet Jonathan was never jealous of David.

“Let’s make a promise to be friends no matter what may happen”, Jonathan said to David one day. David agreed and Jonathan gave him some of his best weapons as a sign of friendship.

Jonathan’s father, King Saul was determined to kill David. He even told Jonathan of his plan to end David’s life.

Jonathan, the loyal friend, warned David to be careful. He told David to go into hiding until Jonathan could talk to his father and get him to change his mind. David did as Jonathan told him and went into hiding.

The next day, Jonathan went to his father and begged him not to hurt David. “Many times, David has risked his life for you in battle. God has given us victory through David.” Saul thought about this and said to Jonathan, “You are right, David does not deserve to die...GO TO SCRIPTURE

Connecting

Loyalty means; “unswerving in allegiance”. Which means that there is nothing that can stop you from keeping your promise to be someone’s friend. You stand up for them no matter what. You are there for them in the good and bad times. Jonathan was loyal to David even when it meant standing up to his father, the King. Jonathan put his own life on the line to stay loyal to David.

God loved Jonathan and David’s friendship because they kept the word and encouraged each other to follow God. To be loyal means you can’t be always looking out for yourself. You have to put the needs of your friend in front of yours. There is no room

to be selfish when you are a loyal friend. When friends choose to do the right things together, God is happy.

Loyalty can be bad at times. Sometimes we are loyal to the wrong people. We may have friends who ask us to do things that are not right. In those cases, loyalty is not what makes God happy. It is good to be loyal to your friends and family but not at the price of doing the wrong thing. The truth is if your friends are being loyal to you, they won’t ask you to do something that could get you in trouble. Likewise, you shouldn’t be asking your own friends to do the wrong thing.

So What?

Who are you loyal to? Is anyone loyal to you? How have they shown it?

Imagine having a friend like Jonathan. Someone who helped you do the right thing, who followed God with you, and who would risk his or her own life to stand up for you.

The Bible tells us that Jesus wants to be that kind of a friend to us. Jesus already gave up his own life to stand up for you. He is so loyal to you that he died so that you could have a friendship with his Father, God. “Greater love has no one than this, but that he lay down his life for a friend.” This bible verse is referring to Jesus, who laid down his life for you.

Do you wish you had a friend like Jonathan? You already do when you allow Jesus to be in your life.

As great as it is to have Jesus as your friend, sometimes it helps to have another human being as a loyal friend. Look around. Is there someone in your life right now who might want to be that loyal friend? If so, what do you need to do to be better friend to them?

If there isn't anyone, start asking God to bring a loyal friend into your life.

Loneliness

Julian's Story

Julian's mom said she couldn't care for him and there was no family to take him in so she got a place for him in a group home. He does ok in school and visits his mom on weekends but he hurts inside. He feels alone even when other people are around. He doesn't think anybody really understands him.

Hannah works at the animal shelter after school. She cleans cages and holds the kittens. Her friends don't understand why she spends all her time with animals and they've stopped inviting her to hang out with them. Hannah's ok, she's alone a lot but not lonely.

Julian and Hannah have to work as a team on a science project. Julian doesn't talk much and Hannah feels shy but smiles as they go through the steps in the science kit. She finds ways to ask him questions like, "Can you show me how to do this step?" and Julian shows her without saying a word.

One day, Hannah looks at Julian and says, "Thank for helping me. I hate Chemistry and you made that project easier."

Julian looks up at her and says, "I thought you were a brain at everything. You always sit alone and read."

"I only read cause I don't have a group to hang out with. I'm usually alone." Hannah responds.

"Yea, me too."

Loneliness can feel like a heavy weight in your gut. It can make you feel depressed or angry or mean. When people are lonely

they sometimes wonder why people don't reach out to them. Lonely people can feel unlikeable, ignored and pushed aside.

- When do you feel lonely?
- Why do you think you are alone?

Jonah's Story

In the Bible there is a story about a lonely man named Jonah. God spoke to Jonah and told him that he should go to a city called Nineveh. The people in the city were doing bad things and God wanted Jonah to tell them to stop. But Jonah did not want to go. He did not want to obey God. Instead, he got on a ship and tried to sail away from God. But God got on a ship and tried to sail away from God. But God knew where Jonah was and he sent a big storm.

"Why has this wild storm come?" Asked the sailors?

"It's because of me," Jonah told them. "If you throw me into the sea the storm will stop."

So they threw Jonah into the sea. The storm stopped.

A huge fish came along and swallowed Jonah! Inside the fish Jonah did not die, but he was VERY ALONE. Jonah prayed and prayed. He Talked to God about being alone and being afraid and not wanting to obey."

After days God saved Jonah. The fish spit him out on a beach! Then God told him, "Jonah, go to Nineveh!"

This time, Jonah went. He told the people that they should stop disobeying God. The people listened and started to change their ways.

Connecting

Jonah was alone for 3 days and nights living in the belly of a giant fish! He prayed to God while he was there. What do you do when you feel totally alone?

Could you try talking with God when you feel lonely?

Talking with God can feel weird because you can't see or hear him. But God is always with you. In fact, no matter how lonely you feel, you are NEVER alone.

When Jesus lived on Earth he had close friends. When Jesus was getting ready to go back to Heaven, he knew his friends would feel alone and scared. Jesus promised that he would NEVER LEAVE THEM.

Matthew 28:20

Jesus says, "I am surely with you always, to the very end of time."

So What?

How could Jesus die and go to Heaven but "Never leave us" like the Bible says?

God is more powerful than anything we know on earth. He can be everywhere at the same time. He knows everyone. He knows every detail about our lives, our hearts and our souls. He even knows how many hairs are on our heads! So even though it's hard to imagine him because you can't see him, God is next to you all the time. He wants you to talk with him just like Jonah did when he was alone.

- He will listen.
- He will hear you.
- He will love you no matter what.
- He already does.

Death & Hope

John 11

Austin's Story

Austin's mom died about a year ago. She got cancer and it took over her body really fast. Being a high school student and losing your mom is hard to describe. On some days, Austin feels so sad he can't even move. He doesn't lift his head to look at his friends. He can't race down the basketball court or even high-5 friends. On other days Austin feels normal. He almost forgets the great sadness that is in his life and he goes around laughing and having fun like a 17-year-old guy should. Then, out of nowhere, the sadness comes back, like a storm that turns the sky totally black and you know there will be rain and thunder.

Austin wonders why God took his mom. He used to love God. He promised to follow Jesus' example. But when his mom died he couldn't understand why. Now Austin feels stuck. His pain is still so big it's hard to be hopeful.

- Have you lost a parent or a close family member?
- Do you remember how it feels?

Lazarus' Story

Jesus understands how it feels to lose someone you love. Jesus had a best friend named Lazarus. Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha were all close friends to Jesus. The Bible says that Lazarus was sick so his two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

It took Jesus a few days to walk to the town where the sisters were. When he got there, everyone told Jesus, "Lazarus has been in the grave for four days." When Jesus saw the sisters weeping and all the people wailing with sadness, his heart broke

too. Jesus cried. He stood by the grave where they had buried his friend Lazarus and he wept.

After moments of sadness, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." Lazarus walked out of the tomb (a cave in those days) still covered in strips of cloth. Many of those who watched put their faith in Jesus that day.

Connecting

It's hard to control the sadness that comes with death. Some people think they should be strong and not cry. Some people get angry because their loss hurts so much. And some people cry and cry.

What do you do when you feel great loss or pain?

How do you think Jesus feels about your pain and loss?

Jesus was sad.

It is important to learn how to be sad. Jesus gave us a good example when he cried because of Lazarus. Jesus didn't hide his emotions. He didn't pretend that everything was ok. Jesus felt deep pain just like we do and he cried, just like we do.

Jesus had hope.

But Jesus also had hope. He knew that God promised eternal life to every person who loves him. Jesus wanted his friends to know that life doesn't end when our bodies get old or sick and we die. Life goes on forever and for people who love Jesus, life in Heaven with God lasts forever.

Austin is still sad. But he also has hope. Austin's mom loved Jesus and she is in Heaven now. He knows that he will see her again. Even though he wants her now, he has hope that he will have her with him someday. Austin planted a small tree in his

yard as a gift to his mom. Some days he sits by it and thinks about her. He imagines her happy as she walks around Heaven. He imagines her telling Jesus jokes and making God laugh. He still cries, but as the tears dry, Austin looks up and knows Jesus understands him and Jesus has his mom.

So What?

How is Jesus giving you hope?

Is there something you can do as a memory-gift for someone you lost, like Austin's tree?

Try any of these ideas. They will help you remember to hope in Jesus...

- Plant something that will remind you of the person you loved and lost.
- Write a poem or song for the person you loved and lost.
- Write a letter to the person you loved and lost.
- Write a note to Jesus about your pain and your hope.
- Talk about the person you loved. Tell others why you are thankful for that person.
- Tell stories about the person you loved. Honor them by keeping their stories alive.