

The Lion that Ran Away



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Foreward

Our intent in these 40 tales is to convey overtones of the unique Good News concepts that permeated the "message of Christ's righteousness" that "the Lord in His great mercy sent" to His people over a century ago. Children need to perceive the difference between "the third angel's message in verity" and popular apostate Christianity.

These stories are from real life, illustrating for minds young and old how the gospel "works" in our everyday experiences.

The bare theological bones, hopefully, are clothed. We write with the earnest prayer that little children may come to sense how good is the news of the New Covenant, how strong is the love of the Good Shepherd who seeks us (rather than waiting for us to find Him!), how close Jesus is to us, how He was "in all points tempted like as" children today are tempted "yet without sin," how children can understand the kind of death He died on His cross, how His love (not fear!) motivates us, how He is right now in all the world calling children to "follow the Lamb wherever He goes," and how it's possible for children to do that, and how it's true that many are responding.

The Lion That Ran Away!

I never tell a story unless I know for sure it's true. And I know this one is, because when I told it one day in church a man got up and said, "That story is true, because it happened to my father!"

Maybe you've seen lions in zoos. But in Africa we have them out in the open. What would you do if you were out walking, and you came face to face with a man-eater?

I have asked children, and they usually tell me, "I would pray." Well, that's a good thing to do. But suppose you forgot to pray? Sometimes the Lord expects us to do something in addition to praying.

Other children tell me they would run away.

But please let me help you here. Have you ever seen a cat chase a mouse? Which can run faster, the mouse or the cat?

That's my point: if you meet a man-eating lion face to face, **DON'T RUN!** That would be the worst thing you could do! Why, he would be so happy to see you run, he'd just love to run a race with you. And then—well, I won't say.

The man who sent a lion running away.

Dr. Sturgess had lots of sick people to take care of, and he was up late, so didn't get much sleep this night. Next morning an African came in to the mission at Mugonero in Rwanda and said, "Bwana, would you please come and bring your gun and shoot the lion that is eating our cows, and goats, and sometimes he has eaten some people."

Dr. Sturgess said, "Why, of course." So he took his 7-mm. Mowser with the hair trigger, and started off walking with the African. They walked and walked until they got to a place where the African said, "Bwana, here is where we last saw the lion."

"All right," said Dr. Sturgess as he reached in his pocket to get the bullets.

"Kumbe!" he yelled (which means in Swahili, "Wow!"). He had forgotten to bring the bullets! He told the African, "I'm a bit tired, been up almost all night. You run back to the mission and fetch the bullets. I'll wait here for you."

But he got a bit sleepy, and lay down to take a little nap.

Then he was awakened by a rustling noise in the grass. He looked up—*and there was the lion!* The lion was wagging his tail like a cat about to jump on a mouse.

Dr. Sturgess stood up, wondering what to do. I don't know if he remembered to pray. But he saw there was no tree he could climb, and he knew that to start running would be the worst thing he could do.

The lion started tensing his muscles, getting ready to pounce. And Dr. Sturgess knew he had to do something quick or he'd be dead. So he decided he would turn things around backwards, and instead of the lion charging him, he would charge the lion: At the top of his voice, and lunging toward the beast and waving his arms, he yelled—

"GO AWAY!!!"

Now you may not believe this, but I'm telling the truth: *that lion ran away!* Now there's no point in my telling you this story for very likely you won't meet a lion anywhere soon.

But there is somebody you *will* meet, and your Bible tells you who he is: "Be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He's more real than any lion in Africa, because he goes everywhere after boys and girls and grown-ups, and tries to tempt them to do or say something they know is wrong so they can be on his side.

But I've got Good News for you: you are bigger and more important than the Devil, and YOU can tell him to get packing, and he will have to obey you. That's right; he cannot force you to do or say anything that's wrong. You're the boss! Let me read it to you:

"Submit yourselves to God." That's number one. Satan respects anyone who has done that! If you have already given your life to the Lord Jesus, the devil will be forced to do what you say. Then number two is: "Resist the devil and he will run away from you" (James 4:7).

It's 100% true; but just remember, it says first of all, "Submit yourself to God." You have chosen to serve Him all your life. You have told the Lord, "I know I belong to You forever!"

The Devil will know you've done this, and he will have to run when he hears you say, "GO AWAY!"

When Satan's temptation comes to you, can you say "NO!?" I mean, stomp your foot and scream it out with every ounce of your soul!

There's more Good News I have for you: All around the world there are boys and girls who are giving their hearts to the Savior in a special way, because they believe Jesus wants to come so soon that they will see Him and be ready to meet Him. When you give your heart to Him, He takes on the job of teaching and preparing you to be one of them.

Will you say "Yes!" to Him?

The Sheep That Couldn't Find Its Way Home

This is a story that Jesus told. This foolish sheep didn't know why it got lost. It probably was its own fault. Evening was coming on, and the shepherd and all the others had gone home, and our one lost sheep was left behind.

It had no idea which way to go. Perhaps it was stuck in a bramble bush and couldn't get free. When it was bleating in fear, there was no one to hear its cry, except maybe some wolf might hear. And that would be terrible.

The sun was going down, and the idea of staying out there in the wild was terrifying. Oh, if only that wonderful man who is our shepherd would just come and find me! He leads us beside the still waters, and makes us lie down in green pastures of lovely grass. I am sure he doesn't want me to be lost like this, out in the wild.

But the lost sheep could do nothing to help itself. No way could it manage to find its way home. If nobody came to save it, it must die.

Meanwhile, the shepherd at home is not happy.

When he gets there with his 99 sheep and counts them, he realizes that one is lost. It would be terrible to leave it out there, maybe to starve or die of thirst, or worse, be eaten by a wolf.

The sun is going down, and night is coming on. He is tired from a long day of hard work. His wife is so happy to see him come home and probably tells him, "Darling husband, I am so glad to see you come home. I have cooked a lovely supper for you—just what you like. Hot soup and corn bread, all your favorite things. It's all ready, so just come."

But the shepherd says, "No, darling, I can't. I have just counted my sheep and one is missing. I can't leave it out there to perish alone, I must go find it."

"But dear husband, you are tired and hungry, and look, there are black clouds gathering and the sun is going down, and the wind is beginning to blow. A storm is coming up. It would be dangerous for you to go out in the dark, looking for just one lost sheep. Don't you have your 99 safe here? Are they not enough for you? Why risk your life for one?"

"Oh, I could never sleep tonight, and I could never enjoy my good supper, thinking about that one lost sheep. It's in distress. I *must* go and find it."

So off the good shepherd went, into the dark, stormy night.

The wild storm came. The wind howled. Only by lightning flashes could he see his way. Over the crags, and down into the valleys, the faithful, loving shepherd went on. Finally he heard the faint sound of the lost sheep bleating in the darkness, afraid. The shepherd was so happy at last to find it.

Do you think he scolded it angrily? "Why have you been so careless to get lost like this? You made me miss my supper and my good night's sleep, you naughty sheep. I wish I could beat you. Serves you right—now you must walk home!" Do you think he said things like that?

No, the sheep was wounded, as well as faint with hunger. The shepherd put it on his shoulders and *carried* it home! Heavy load back up those mountains.

And when he came home, he was so happy he called his friends and neighbors and asked them to have a party with him. This was great fun! A sheep had been lost, but it was found again. Everybody wanted to join in.

And it was about something far more important than one lost sheep. It is about you, and me, being lost and found. He is singing songs because He found *YOU*. Are you singing, too? And wouldn't you like to spend your life helping Him find some more lost sheep?

We are so much like sheep, which don't know which way to go unless a shepherd guides them, and they get lost easily. And wolves love to eat them. We don't know which way to go, and we get lost easily as we wander away from Jesus. We need Him with us all the way, every hour of every day.

He says that "the sheep hear His voice as He calls His own sheep by name, and He leads them out" (John 10:4). And we know the Voice of our Savior. When Satan tries to call us aside, we know that his voice is not that of our Shepherd.

Jesus would not be happy if we followed Him only because we are scared. He is happy when we follow Him because we love Him. He said, "I am the good shepherd who is willing to die

for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd ... I know My sheep and they know Me. And I am willing to die for them" [that's you and me] (verses 11-15).

What's the point of this story?

Jesus is not waiting for us to find Him. He is not some great earthly king or president that nobody can visit, unless they get invited. Nor is He like some busy doctor in his office who never has time to go out looking for sick people to heal. Jesus *searches* for sick people!

He is looking for us! He takes the first step.

And there is one more little point in this wonderful story. The Good Shepherd not only looks for His lost sheep, but He *keeps searching "until He finds it."* In looking for you and for me, He never gives up.

Maybe there is someone you love that you are praying for. You pray and pray, but it seems that nothing happens. The Good Shepherd didn't stop searching!

Sometimes children pray for old grandparents; they love them. But grandparents are old and don't change easily. But this story that Jesus told helps us understand. Jesus never gives up even on old people. So don't stop praying for them. Old people can change. Often we don't know what's in their hearts, but the Savior knows.

And sometimes we pray for our parents, and it seems backwards, for usually parents are the ones who pray for their children. But that's good—let children pray for their parents! Often they are lost as much as other people are lost.

And remember that your prayer is in God's computer and will never be lost!

Doesn't your heart say, with mine, "Thank You, dear Savior, for finding me. Thank You for giving up everything in order to come and find me. And now I choose to give myself and my whole life to You, because of Your great love for me."

How Little People Can Be Very Important

There was daddy, mother, Bobby, John, and Margie, all five of us packed in this little Volkswagen "bug" on a camping trip in Europe on our way home from Africa. And we had very, very little money, just couldn't dream of staying in a motel.

Our tent was in a big bag, and we had our camping table, pots and pans, dishes, and of course all our suitcases in this little "bug." The poor little car groaned beneath our weight. Evening would come as we found a camping spot, and everybody in the family had his assigned duties. The boys would pitch the tent, dad would prepare the camp cots, etc., and get things out so mom could cook some welcome hot supper. But there was one thing that dad, mom, Bob, or John, couldn't do: get some petrol (gasoline) for the tiny little camp stove we had. We didn't have a cubic inch where we could store a little can for gasoline; we had to rely on the Volkswagen's gasoline tank for our supply. But how to get the gasoline out of it for the camp stove?

The filler place for the car's tank was so small in diameter that none of us could reach in with a small cup and draw some out. All our hands were just too big.

But there was Margie! She was only four, and her hand was exactly the right size to reach in with a cup and draw out some fuel for our little camp stove.

After she had done this for several evenings, she said, "Daddy, I'm important—don't you think?" And I said, "Yes, dear, you *are* important! None of us could have a bite of hot supper if it weren't for you!"

He said, "Let the children come to Me, and do not stop them" (Matthew 19:14), He meant that He needs children. For one thing, they make Him happy. For another, He has things for them to do that no one else can do quite as well. Yes, children *are* important!

For example, once upon a time grown-ups in Europe made a law that said no one could preach about the second coming of Jesus. But God wants people to know about it! The grown-ups were all afraid to say anything. But God had commanded that this Good News of the second coming of Jesus *must* be told to the people.

What happened was that the Holy Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of some little children to stand up and tell the Good News! Little girls, for example, were just ordinary children playing with their dolls. But when the meeting time came and people arrived to hear the message, one by one they left their dolls and standing on a table these children told the message so clearly that the people understood.

So, *YOU* believe that the Lord Jesus loves *YOU*; believe that He has already called *YOU* to follow Him; believe that He has died for *YOU*, has redeemed *YOU*; believe that He has work for *YOU* to do; let the love of Christ fill *your* heart. Tell Him "Yes!" that you will be glad to be His servant.

He will have work for *YOU* to do!

Moja and the Heavy Glass Door

One day we went to the San Diego Zoo to see four baby lion cubs. The zoo people gave them Kiswahili names; and since we had learned Kiswahili in Kenya, we wanted to see the cubs, whose names were Moja, Bili, Tatu, Nne (which mean One, Two, Three, Four). When we got home, to our surprise our Margaret's cat had just given birth to four little kittens. And of course we promptly named them Moja, Bili, Tatu, Nne, after the famous lion cubs. We decided to keep Moja and we gave the other three to church members who were willing to take them (I guess some thought having one of the "pastor's kittens" was nice).

Moja grew up to become a very handsome cat. He looked almost like a little black papa lion. And yes, we loved him.

Our dinette was just by the sliding glass door that led outside. Often when we were eating, Moja would come up outside, watch us through the glass, and would beg to be let in. He would meow and meow, and scratch on the glass with his paws. I began to be a bit tired getting up and opening the sliding door for him.

Then I decided, Why not train Moja to open the sliding glass himself? True, the door was a bit heavy sliding, but I thought that Moja, being a strong papa cat, could learn to do it.

So I went outside to be with him, opened the door a couple of inches, knelt down and took his forepaws in my hands, and with his paws in my hands, we together grasped the edge of the sliding glass door where he could reach it, and gently pulled back. I did it with him several times.

I'm sure he wondered what crazy idea I had this time. And for sure, it wasn't fun for him.

A day or so later, we were eating and Moja came up again, begging for me to slide the door back and let him in. I said, "Moja, you know what to do. Why must I get up and let you in?"

More meows. Even pitiful ones.

I decided to be stubborn, and just sit still. Moja needed the boost to his ego to know that he could *himself slide* that door back! It would make him a happier, self-respectful cat, I thought. It will strengthen his self-esteem! And the exercise will be good for him.

After a few moments, in desperation, Moja grasped the edge of that door with his two forepaws, and tugged with all his might. The door slid back several inches! He scrambled in. After that, he did it often.

Do you think I was being cruel to Moja?

No, I was helping him. I had taught him a valuable thing to do, even though he didn't like the lessons at first. Our Moja developed the strongest muscles in his paws of any cat in the neighborhood. He became the king of all the cats on Mariposa Circle!

Do you know that the Lord Jesus loves you very much? In fact, He loves you so much that He gives you things to do that at first you may think are hard to do. That is called "discipline." It makes you wiser, better. No one can learn anything worthwhile in life without this word "discipline."

The Bible is easy to understand. It says: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline, nor lose heart when He corrects you; for the Lord disciplines those whom He loves; He lays the rod on every son whom He acknowledges" (Hebrews 12:4-6, NEB).

When I was a little boy, my parents wanted me to take violin lessons. My teacher was a man who believed in discipline: he even once hit my fingers with a ruler when I was lazy holding the instrument right. People today wouldn't like such "discipline," but it got my attention, and when the time came for me to go to college, my new violin professor said, "You have no bad habits in violin playing." My first teacher's discipline paid off!

Let's stop a moment and play a little game. Can you think forward for a moment maybe 10 or 20 years? Forget you are as little as you are today, and picture yourself a grown person. Imagine yourself a well-taught grown-up, someone people everywhere respect; you hold your head high; you know how to do things; you can talk well so people want to listen to you; they respect you for your wisdom. And best of all, you are a really happy person!

What has made you the wonderful person that you are?

That's right! It's DISCIPLINE.

The Lord's discipline in your life will pay off! "God is treating you as sons. ... He does so for our true welfare" (vs. 11). Believe Him, let Him teach you, and you'll be happy forever!

Moja and His Mess

I told you what a wonderful cat Moja became. He used to perch on top the big water bottle and when the man would bring us a new one, he was a little afraid of Moja. He looked so much like a lion. Moja was something!

He was nice. He would curl up in your arms and purr.

But there was one lesson Moja seemed he just couldn't learn. He always refused to use the sandbox! He insisted on making his mess on the floor somewhere.

So I dutifully cleaned up after him all the time. Just endured it, because we liked him. He was part of our family.

And I often took Moja to church Sabbath morning for some children's story. I used him as an illustration. And you can be sure, the kids all loved Moja. Each wanted to be the one to go get him when story time came just before the sermon. In fact, the whole church enjoyed and loved Moja.

But I finally got very tired of cleaning up his messes. I knew I couldn't give him away to anyone, for no one would want those messes on his carpet. So I decided I had no choice but to take Moja down to the pound and let them just put him to sleep.

So I thought I should let the children at church say "goodbye" to him so I took him for my story and told them what was going to have to happen. It wasn't because I didn't love Moja, for I did love him; but we just couldn't

forever have those messes in our nice clean house. He had *disqualified himself* from being a part of our family! So, he had to go. Goodbye, Moja.

Then I told the children, that's what it's going to be like in the final judgment of the people who will be lost. God has always loved those people, *but they themselves have disqualified themselves from getting ready to enter heaven*. God still will love every one who must go into the lake of fire, but those people would keep on making the mess of sin in heaven; God can't let that keep on happening in heaven. And that's the reason for the Bible teaching of the "punishment of the wicked."

Well, I thought I had at last found the perfect children's story. And yes, I knew that the children would feel sorry (you never saw kids pet a cat like they were petting Moja after that; they didn't want to say goodbye to him). But feeling sorry is just how God feels, only in a much bigger way. And it's not wrong for children to feel a little bit how God feels.

"As surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the living God, I do not enjoy seeing a sinner die" (Ezekiel 33:11).

But what happened next made me change my mind.

When I was shaking hands at the door after the worship service, grown-ups were telling me, "I'll never come back to this church again if you have that cat put to sleep!"

So I took Moja home and I had to bring him back to church again the next Sabbath.

And that's our next story.

Moja Gets Saved

On the way home from church after the people demanded that Moja not be put to sleep, he was in the car with me. I said, "Moja, you don't know how close you came to going to the pound! But some good people who have learned to know you and love you have saved your life!" He purred all the way home.

So the next Sabbath, here comes Moja to church again. I told the children what had happened at the door as I was shaking hands with the people last Sabbath, and how those people had stepped in and actually saved Moja from going to the pound.

In my arms as I stood before the children, Moja purred delightedly.

So then I told the children a lovely story that Jesus told the people. It fits in with this experience Moja had.

"There was once a rich man who had a servant who managed his property [that means, the rich man trusted this servant]. The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his master's money, so he called him in and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Turn in a complete account of your handling of my property, because you cannot be my manager any longer'" (Luke 16:1, 2). That meant that at last this servant was going to be fired. He would have to go begging.

But this servant was not only a thief; he was also a very smart man, and in the story Jesus told, the master praised his being so clever.

"The servant said to himself, 'My master is going to dismiss me from my job. What **shall I** do? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg.'

"Now I know what I will do!" (verses 3, 4).

So he began cheating his master all the more, telling the people who owed him money that he would give them a receipt "Paid in full" if they paid only a little of what they owed. This way he figured he could make a lot of friends, so when he was fired and had nowhere to go, these people would welcome him and take him in. He would have food and a place to stay as long as he lived.

Clever, wasn't it?

Then Jesus told what the story means: We are to live to help other people, to bless them, to "make friends" among them. Then when we come to the final great judgment and we have nothing good to set before the Lord (none of us is good of himself!), these people who have become our "friends" will step up for us and ask that we be let in to heaven.

Now, let's not misunderstand: Jesus was not teaching that our friends can save us in the final judgment; only the grace of the Lord can save anyone. But the point of Jesus' story is that if you have given your life to serve Jesus, many people will be your friends forever in heaven! They'll make you feel happy there! And you will feel welcome.

That's important! You'd be miserable in heaven if you knew you weren't wanted there, wouldn't you? Getting to heaven is learning to be happy there! That's why here and now we learn to give up the sinful, worldly things that couldn't make us happy there.

And Moja became my little illustration for telling this story.

After church that Sabbath, Moja was happy to get home again.

Bobby and the Black Oil

Sometimes I like to ask children a question: "Does God love bad boys and bad girls?" Some children aren't sure. Then I ask, "Does God love boys and girls better if they are good?" And again, some don't quite know how to answer.

When we lived in Africa, one day I had to work on our car, a Model A Ford. Bobby was about 3-1/2, and he wanted to watch me work on the car. When we came from America on a boat, we had lost his clothes on the boat and all we had was a nice white jumper suit and one pair of white shoes. With his beautiful blond hair, he looked nice all dressed up, not at all like a mechanic's helper.

I said, "Bobby, sure, you can watch me work on the car. But one thing: don't get your hands in that basin of black oil that I have drained out of the engine." The basin was there on the ground, at one side.

All went well as I was working on the engine, my hands of course getting dirty. But then several of the teachers came from the school to talk about some school problems, and while my back was turned, can you guess what happened?

Bobby forgot about what I had said. That shiny black oil in the basin looked too nice. He wondered what it felt like. So he gave in to the temptation, and put his hands in it.

But then when he drew his hands out, they were all black with this gooey dirty oil! Then he remembered what Daddy had said. And he thought he'd better get rid of the evidence.

So he started wiping his greasy, dirty black hands all over his nice white jumpsuit, and even on his beautiful yellow hair. The dirty black oil was even dropping on his one and only pair of shoes—the white ones. He was a sight!

What do you think I did?

Some children have said, "You spanked him!"

No, he was only a 3-1/2 year old child. I didn't get angry with him. He had just been curious, he was wanting to learn.

Do you think I called out to the Africans, "Hey, you Africans! You want a little missionary boy? You can have him—he's all dirty now!" Do you think I said that?

No, I loved him just as much when he was dirty as when he was clean. I could not hug him at the moment, lovable as he was; he was too oily with black oil. (If I remember aright, I think I picked him up and gave him to his mother.) But I wouldn't think of giving him away.

The point is that God loves you just as much when you are bad as when you are good. That doesn't mean that He doesn't care; and it doesn't mean that He doesn't want to clean you up (and all of us). The teachers and Pharisees were upset with Jesus because He showed that He liked to be with bad people (so He could save them). "One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling. 'This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them'" (Luke 15:1, 2).

Jesus said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). Yes, it may sound bad, but it is true: Jesus loves dirty people! When you make a mistake and you feel guilty and polluted, you are not to feel that God no longer loves you; He does!

Why did I love Bobby so much that I wouldn't think of giving him away? The reason is that he was my own child! We were forever together! When Jesus gave Himself on his cross, He bought you; Ephesians says

God the Father "chose" you to be His child "through Christ," He made you

"His son," He adopted you (1:4-13). An adopted child is just as much loved as one who was born in the family. If an adopted child makes a mistake, the new parents never disown him. So, when you feel guilty, when the Holy Spirit convicts you that you have sinned, remember that the Father loves you just the same.

Now, let Him clean you; accept His forgiveness; thank Him that He still has "adopted" you into His family. Be glad for His love that never can fail. And tell everybody you can, that He loves bad people and He wants to make them become good people!

Did you know that the Bible says that God has "fun" just as we like to have fun? The word that is used in the Bible is "pleasure," but it really means the same.

Can you guess what God has "fun" doing?

The dirtier, the more sinful, the more hopeless some person seems to be, the more "fun" God has in watching him or her transformed into some one who is the very person Christ died to save!

The Man Jesus Met on the Road

Once there was a man who was doing everything wrong. Not only was he doing wrong things himself, but he was trying to stop other people from doing what was right. He got so bad this way that he tried to put people in prison who were doing what was right.

The amazing truth is that Jesus loved this terrible man. Inside, he didn't totally 100 percent *want* to be bad, because deep in his heart he was honest. He was doing all his badness because he had been taught the wrong way since he was a little boy. Jesus knew that if only he could be brought to see the truth, he would change from being a bad man to become a very good man through believing the truth about Jesus. The man's name?

He was Saul of Tarsus, a member of the great Jewish leadership that had crucified Jesus. He was taught to think of Jesus as a man who deceived the people. That was a false idea, but Saul believed all the lies that had been told him. The Bible says that "Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail"(Acts 8:3). We would sort of not like such a man, wouldn't we?

But he could not destroy the church even if he tried ever so hard, because those "who were scattered went everywhere preaching the message" (verse 4). The more Saul hated the church, the more new people joined it.

Jesus wasn't afraid that Saul would actually stop the gospel from going everywhere, for He knew that nobody *could* stop it. But Jesus was concerned for Saul himself. Not only was he going to be lost if he kept on in this bad way; he was ruining his own life now, because deep in his heart he knew he was on the wrong way. So Jesus decided to do something.

While Saul was on his way to the city of Damascus, intent on dragging Christians to jail, Jesus Himself decided to stop him on the way and ask a simple question: "Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?" Until now, Saul had never realized that Jesus was not dead any more; He was risen! Saul tells us what happened:

"Who are You, Lord?" I asked. And the Lord answered, 'I am Jesus whom you persecute'" (Acts 26:14, 15). Saul had never understood that in persecuting the people who believed in Jesus he was really persecuting the Son of God. For the first time he began to realize that he was terribly wrong.

Jesus told him that if he kept on doing this bad thing, it would be the hardest thing he had ever tried to do. "You are hurting yourself by kicking back, like an ox kicking against its owner's stick." Maybe there was a farmer right there beside the road trying to plow with his ox and using a sharp iron goad or stick to prick the lazy animal to walk faster. If the ox hangs back he hurts himself; it's easier for the ox to just keep on doing his duty, go forward, rather than to hang back. This is how Jesus tried to help Saul to see himself as he really was—*he was fighting against God!* That's hard work.

What Jesus said makes sense to everybody. Fighting against God is the hardest thing any person can ever do. In contrast, Jesus said that following Him is the easiest thing—yes, that's what He said! Listen!—"Come to Me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest." Some children have been taught that if they follow Jesus, it is the hard way to go. Never! "The yoke I will give you is easy, " says Jesus; "and the load I will put on you is light" (Matthew 11:29, 30).

Why It's So Hard to Fight Against God

Did Jesus love Saul of Tarsus for trying to hinder him like this on his way to Damascus? Or should Jesus have said, Don't try to hinder him. If he wants to go the wrong way, we'll find someone to take his place. Goodbye, Saul. Is that what Jesus said?

If someone tried to save your life, wouldn't you be thankful? Jesus met Saul and asked him this question, and told him he was ruining his life by kicking against the stick. But it wasn't Jesus who was making his way "hard." Jesus simply told him that the way he had chosen to go was already the "hard" way, not the easy way. That was that!

The Holy Spirit was convincing Saul deep in his heart that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, the Savior. But Saul didn't want to believe the truth. He was fighting the Holy Spirit. While trying to sleep at night, he must have been having nightmares, and would wake up in fear. Then he would choose again to go on in the way he had chosen, and "persecute Jesus." But deep in his heart he was constantly fighting against the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and he learned how that's the hardest thing any one can do.

Jesus doesn't say, I will give you a hard time. No; those who refuse to come to Him are the ones who have a hard time; *they have made their way hard.*

What He says is true! In the long run, it's easier to be saved in God's kingdom, than it is to be lost. But many people have tried to twist what Jesus said backwards. They say it is hard to follow Jesus and it is easy to follow Satan. They think the path to heaven is hard, uphill all the way with all kinds of rocks and setbacks in the way. They think God has made it hard to be saved, that the path that goes downhill is the easy one. They think God just stands back and lets us keep on going the wrong way—which really means that He doesn't care if we're saved or lost. But He *does* care!

The path that goes downhill, the way the world follows, is the hard way because there are all kinds of things along the way to warn us, "Don't go on!" The Lord loves us so much that He has put those things in the path that leads to hell.

And all along the way that leads to heaven, the Lord has put nice rest places for us, refreshing water of life, delicious fresh bread of life to feed us. Even the sacrifices we are called to make for Jesus become easy when we realize that Jesus is yoked up with us. He says, "Take My yoke and put it on you, and learn from Me, ... and you will find rest" (Matthew 11:29). Whatever sacrifices we *think* we make in order to follow Jesus are "easy" when we remember what He sacrificed for us!

Someone who was wise has said that if we don't resist Jesus as we go along through life, He will lead us all the way into His everlasting kingdom. This reminds us of how much He loves us!

Want to Hear About My 20 Million Babies?

One Sabbath in church I had told my regular story to the children who came forward. Then I said: "You must be sure to come back next Sabbath, because I am going to tell you about the 20 million babies I have at home." You can be sure they asked their parents, "Please bring me back next Sabbath so I can hear about those 20 million babies!" And sure enough, they were there.

I had not been fooling them. I really did have millions of "babies" at home, for I had just planted a new lawn by scattering tiny little seeds all over. I am sure there must have been millions. And they had sprouted and there were little green things popping up all over. It was pretty.

But you know, each one was a miracle! I could not have "made" one little seed that would grow even if my life had depended on it. In that tiny little thing so small that I could hardly see it in my hand, was the truth of life. When it fell in the moist ground, and the warm sun came up to shine on it, it popped open and little roots began to go downwards and the little stem that makes the grass green began to go upwards.

All the great scientists in the world with their wonderful wisdom to do things, could not make one living blade of grass

When Jesus was a Boy your age, He must have held one of those tiny seeds in His hand. He was learning something important from just watching

Then He knelt down and planted that little seed in the ground, buried it out of sight. If the little seed could talk, it might have cried: "Why are You burying me here out of sight? I want to see the sunlight all day, and now it's dark down here in the ground. I am finished!" And it would wail. But that was the best thing that had ever happened to it!

What Jesus learned was something that apparently no one else in all the world had ever learned. *Life comes from death!* When He was having a hard time in the land of the Jews, and the leaders were rejecting Him and He knew they planned on crucifying Him, some big men came from a far-off country known as Greece. It was a wealthy place. They wanted to visit with Jesus and talk to Him.

Probably they invited Him to come over to their country; the people there would not try to kill Him or reject His teaching. They would listen to Him as a great Teacher. These visitors from Greece would tell Him, You don't have to stay here where the people don't like You and Your life is so hard!

At that time Jesus tells us about this lesson He had learned as a Boy from watching that little seed die in the ground alone: "A grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains." He was thinking of His cross that was coming up soon.

He sees that He Himself is the little "grain of wheat." If He accepts this invitation to go to Greece and have a good life, then even if He saves His own life He will leave His people to perish in their sins. He could live and die in Greece and end up no more than Aristotle or Socrates (famous Greek teachers)—dead in their graves.

Then He told the lesson:

"Whoever loves his own life will lose it" [and we could include Himself in that "whoever," for He is talking about Himself as well as about us!]; "whoever hates His own life in this world will keep it for life eternal" (John 12:20-25). And think of what He has done by letting Himself be like a seed dropped in the ground! Yes, He was crucified; but He has risen from the dead and now He is the Savior of the whole world. The "many seeds" which have come to life because He was the one seed that fell in the ground and died have become many, many millions of happy people redeemed for all eternity.

You are one of them!

Jesus wants you to be happy as you grow up. "Whoever wants to serve Me must follow Me, so that My servant will be with Me where I am. And My Father will honor anyone who serves Me" (verse 26).

That's a happy thought to keep thinking, isn't it?

If you are drowning in the ocean, and someone jumps in and risks his life to save you, you want to say "Thank you!" don't you? And if that person later needs some help, you want to give it, don't you? You will do anything to show your being thankful for his saving your life.

That's how I feel to the Lord for saving me from a terrible death on that October afternoon in 1989 in Oakland, California. And my wife, Grace, too.

We had just flown in to San Francisco airport that afternoon and had driven our car over the great Bay Bridge on our way to Alameda to visit our son Bob (that's the bridge where part of it collapsed just a half hour later in the earthquake, sending some cars and people down into the Bay). Usually when we left Alameda to drive home to where we live, we would take the Nimitz Freeway north until it joins on to Interstate 80. Part of it in Oakland was then stacked on top of each other like a sandwich—the cars and trucks going north were on the freeway just underneath the freeway going south—like peanut butter in a sandwich.

But just as we were leaving, my Bob suggested that we go by the Food Mill Bakery and get some of their delicious whole wheat bread. Good idea! So that took us off the Nimitz Freeway, and we drove an aroundabout way until we got on to Interstate 80 just above where the Nimitz Freeway joined it. So we had missed the Nimitz sandwich completely.

Just as we drove on to 1-80 in our Honda, it got so I couldn't steer it. It was weaving all over the road. The steering wheel felt like all four of my tires had suddenly gone flat. So I stopped at the side of the road and got out to look at them. But they were all just like they ought to be. I was perplexed, but I got back in the car and we started off again, not knowing that there had been a terrible earthquake. A mere half a mile behind us there were cars and trucks caught in the big sandwich, the collapse of the south-bound freeway on top of the north-bound freeway. We didn't know it at that moment, but our going out of the way to buy some whole-wheat bread had saved us from being crushed in that terrible "sandwich."

When a few minutes later we learned on the radio the truth of what had happened, we both prayed and thanked the Lord for saving us. Our lives could have come to an end right then.

As I think about it, I begin to understand: *our lives don't belong to us*. When someone saves us from drowning, we want to say "Thank you!" as though we owe that person our lives. And just saying so to God sounds empty, unless we *give* Him our lives.

There was a man who understood this and he told the whole world about it: "The love of Christ constraineth us [that means, His love moves us, almost forces us!], because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live [that's you and I] should henceforth live not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, KJV). It's the same "Thank You, thank You, thank You," idea! How can I hold anything back from Him—my next breath even is my debt to Him.

And that's what we do—we have given Him our lives and all we have. Won't you do the same?

When The Lord's Angel Saved Our Lives

If you are drowning in the ocean, and someone jumps in and risks his life to save you, you want to say "Thank you!" don't you? And if that person later needs some help, you want to give it, don't you? You will do anything to show your being thankful for his saving your life. That's how I feel to the Lord for saving me from a terrible death on that October afternoon in 1989 in Oakland, California. And my wife, Grace, too.

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Who Brought You Into the World?

Maybe you've heard someone say that your mother and father brought you into the world. They had a part in it, they cooperated with God in doing it, but the One who brought you into the world *was God Himself*. Your father and mother knew nothing about how to make you!

The Bible says to your father and mother, "You can no more understand what [God] does than you understand how new life begins in the womb of a pregnant woman" (Ecclesiastes 11:5). If He "makes all things," that means He made you!

And who is God?

He is the Father also of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that means straight off that God has intended you to be a brother or a sister of Jesus Himself. *You are a very important person*. And that means that you want to do and say things that are right. God Himself gave you that desire.

Here are some neat words that you can say to God (they are a prayer that anyone can say to Him. You can make them your prayer tonight before you go to sleep):

"You created every part of me; You put me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because ... all You do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together there in secret, You knew that I was there—You saw me before I was born. ..." (Psalm 139:13-16).

If you can't sleep at night, start thinking about how God fitted every nerve in your body and in your brain before you were born. You are more complex than any computer anyone has ever made. If your father had red hair, more than likely you have red hair. Why? No one knows. Tiny little things that no one has ever seen are passed on from father and mother to the child, all of it somehow in what we call the DNA. It makes each of us different.

Can you imagine a cord that no one can see that stretches all the way back through your parents and grandparents on and on to Adam and Eve, our first parents on earth? That's our DNA; and little threads smaller than a spider's web are added to it by each new father and mother along the way. But God knows every tiny little nerve cell that went into making *you* what you are.

When Jesus was born as a Baby, was He a part of that mysterious cord that no one can see, our DNA?

Or did God start from scratch when Jesus was to come into the world as our Savior and make a new Baby like He made Adam in the beginning—out of the dirt in the ground? Remember, the Bible says, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground," Genesis 2:7. Is that how God formed Jesus as a Baby? Or did His mother conceive Him in her womb with all the DNA we have all inherited from the fallen Adam? And did Jesus grow as a tiny baby there for nine months until she was ready to give birth to Him?

The Bible tells us "Yes." Jesus was conceived in the womb of a woman named Mary. She was a virgin, that is, she had never slept with a man. Her Baby had no earthly father such as everyone else in the world has had. But except for that, Jesus took part in all that same DNA that we inherit from our parents all the way back to Adam. (You can read all about it in Romans 8:3, 4 and Hebrews 4:14-16.)

The Bible says that just as "the children ... are people of flesh and blood, Jesus Himself became like them and shared their human nature" (Hebrews 2:14). It also says "that He had to become like His brothers in every way, in order to be their faithful and merciful High Priest in His service to God, so that the people's sins would be forgiven. And now He can help those who are tempted, because He Himself was tempted and suffered" (verse 17). That means that as a Child, Jesus knew how you feel. When He fell down and skinned His knees, that hurt just as much as it hurts for you.

It also means that He was just as much tempted as you are tempted to be selfish, *but* He never gave in to that temptation. He is the only Baby ever to grow up to be a Boy who was never selfish. Often as a Child He would give His own lunch to someone who was hungry. He looked just like you—no one would have guessed by looking at Him that He was the Son of God! The difference between Him and you and me is that He was God in human flesh, and the Bible says that always "God is love" (1 John 4:8). What was different was His character.

The Bible says that you and I are standing before the Lord dressed in tattered, filthy old rags; but Jesus takes His own spotless, beautiful robe of perfect character and covers us with it.

But does He force us to wear it?

No, He will force no one. If you squirm and resist Him and tell Him, "No, I like my filthy rags" (I am sorry, many do), He will not force you.

But I tell Him, "Thanks, Jesus, my Savior! Let me have those nice new clothes." Won't you tell Him the same?

The Story of the Proud Baobab Tree

This one is not in the Bible, and I'm not sure it's even true. It's a story our African friends told us and I'm going to tell it like they told it. And of course it *may be* true, because we know that God *does* do things like the Africans say He did to the Baobab tree. Today the Baobab is probably the ugliest tree that grows in Africa. It doesn't have pretty green leaves. Its trunk and branches are gnarled all out of shape, twisting this way and that in weird shapes. In fact, it looks like a big brown tree root sticking up of the ground upside down.

Long ago, the Africans tell us, the Baobab was the most beautiful tree in Africa. Birds loved to roost in its branches and sing there. It had lovely green leaves, and its shade was what all the animals craved to be under. All the other trees in Africa were jealous of the Baobab tree.

But then it became proud of its beauty, the Africans tell us. It was so proud and ugly in its character of pride, that God punished it. He pulled it up by the root (the Africans say) and then stuck it back into the ground, upside down! And indeed, it looks like that's what happened to it.

I don't laugh at the story, for the Bible does tell things like that. Lucifer was the highest of all the angels in heaven when there was no sin. His name meant "the morning star." He was indeed the most beautiful of all the angels whom God had created. The Bible tells what God said to him: "Bright morning star, you have fallen from heaven! ... Now you have been thrown into the ground. You were determined to climb up to heaven and to place your throne above the highest stars. ... You said you would climb to the tops of the clouds and be like the Almighty. But instead you have been brought down to the deepest part of the world of the dead" (Isaiah 14:12-15). Lucifer was Satan's name before he decided he wanted to sin.

God also told him something else: "You were once an example of perfection! How wise and handsome you were! ... You had ornaments of gold. They were made for you on the day you were created. ... You lived on My holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems. Your conduct was perfect from the day you were created until you began to do evil. ... This led to violence and sin. So I forced you to leave My holy mountain, and the angel who guarded you drove you away. ... You were proud of being handsome, and your fame made you act like a fool. Because of this I hurled you to the ground. ... All who look at you now see you reduced to ashes. You are gone, gone forever" (Ezekiel 28:12-19). God can't save Satan, but He can save you and me!

That explains why Satan is so bad; he was proud of himself. That pride is the door that leads to all kinds of bad ways to be.

Could we today have a problem with our own beauty, or what we think is our handsomeness? Yes, God Himself has made you look nice. Do we feel like we may be better than other children? Has pride made us think only of ourselves? Do we dress in such a way that we want to tempt other people? Do we like to look at ourselves in the mirror? If we do, everybody is that way, but it's wrong. It's something that we inherited from the fallen Adam, who gave himself to learn Satan's ways.

A great king of Babylon learned his lesson about being proud.

He was indeed handsome. The Lord loved him and warned him, but he never listened. Then the Lord left him alone, left him to himself, sort of turned His back on him.

The great king became like a cow! He went out in the palace yard and ate like a cow; he was out of his head for seven long years. At the end when the Lord healed him again, the king (whose name was Nebuchadnezzar) left us this word: "Everything [God] does is right and just, and He can humble anyone who acts proudly" (Daniel 4:30).

Wouldn't it make good sense for us to humble ourselves *before* He has to let that happen to us?

And there is another reason for us not to wear jewelry and spend money for the latest fashions (girls or boys): *we are living in God's great last Day of Atonement*, the real one.

Long ago in Israel the people observed their little day of atonement once a year, on the tenth day of their seventh month. On that day they wore no jewelry; they didn't indulge in pride, but they kept thinking about what their high priest was doing in his work in the most holy apartment of their sanctuary, the one that was like a toy to teach them about the real one, the great Day of Atonement in the last days.

Now Jesus is working in this Day of Atonement, the real one, *the real* Most Holy Apartment. He invites us to lift our eyes up from this crazy world so full of its baubles and foolishness and pride, and think of what *He* is doing just now.

And that is ... getting a people ready for His soon return.

The day that Jesus died on His cross was the greatest day the world had ever seen; but this Day when He comes again is what the Bible says is "the *great* Day of the Lord" (Zephaniah 1:14).

Makes sense to think about it now, doesn't it? We want to be happy on that day!

Why the Lady's Prayer Wasn't Answered (Right Away)

This story in the Bible is different! It seems almost like it doesn't belong in the Bible, it's so much *unlike* Jesus.

It's about a lady who did everything right that she knew, was as "worthy" as anyone ever was, but when she prayed, Jesus "answered her not a word" (Matthew 15:23). Sometimes people (and children) pray and it seems that He "answers [them] not a word"!

I remember once I had a pet chicken, a Rhode Island Red hen. I called her "Brownie." She became sick. In Sunday School the teachers had told us that Jesus answers prayer, and it's true, *He does* answer prayer. But when I prayed for Brownie, she simply died, just as though I had not prayed.

Plenty of children wonder if they can trust the miracle stories they hear of wonderfully answered prayer. Sometimes they get discouraged. So it's interesting to find a story in the Bible about a lady praying when Jesus "answered her not a word."

This time Jesus was visiting in a "foreign land," you might say, a long walk up to what was called "the region of Tyre and Sidon," where people called Gentiles lived. Jews thought Gentiles were people God didn't care about.

Jesus with His disciples was walking down the road when a Gentile lady came up to Him. She had heard about Him, and believed that He was the true Messiah, Savior of the world." She had heard that He healed the sick, and did many wonderful things for people who asked Him. She "cried out to Him" so as to be sure He heard her, "'Son of David! Have mercy upon me! My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition.'" (When this Gentile lady called Him "Son of David," that's how we know she believed He was the "Savior of the world.") Please heal my daughter!

Always Jesus would never turn anyone away. So it's very surprising to read that He "did not say a word to her." He just kept on walking as though she was a nobody. Have you ever wondered if Jesus thinks *you* are a nobody? This story is for you!

But she kept on pleading with Him. He acted as though the prayer of a Gentile woman meant nothing to Him. "His disciples came to Him and begged Him, 'Send her away! She is following us and making all this noise!'" She must have annoyed them, asking them to get Him to pay attention to her.

He just walks on with His disciples getting annoyed with this lady. If He would only tell her "Go away!" she would leave them to enjoy their little vacation "near the cities of Tyre and Sidon." The lady's daughter can just stay sick so far as they cared. *She's nobody.*

Now what's going to happen?

The lady kept on pleading. Then Jesus said something that shocks us. How could He say this to her? "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel." In other words, I don't have anything for you Gentiles! Goodbye.

But she wouldn't say goodbye; she hung on.

Then she plunked herself down in His path, so He couldn't move. "At this the woman came and fell at His feet. 'Help me, Sir!'" She probably looked Him right in the eyes.

Then He said something that must have been hard for her to take. "Jesus answered, 'It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'" But bad as that sounded, she didn't get angry.

The lady was smart. She came right back at Him, "That's true, Sir," she answered. But even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table." Jesus loves to have people pray to Him like that! Be honest, and tell Him how you feel. Don't try to hide anything.

When He heard her say that, Jesus could play this game no longer. All this while, His disciples had been watching and listening. Now they were to see how their ideas had been wrong: "So Jesus answered her, 'You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you!' And at that very moment her daughter was healed" (verses 21 -28).

All this had been something like a game. Jesus was only pretending, acting this way. He knew His disciples had the wrong idea about Gentiles; He wanted *them* to learn. They never afterward forgot. God loves *everybody*, not just those who think they are His chosen people.

Jesus had heard her, but this time she had to wait until He taught His disciples a lesson.

When you pray, know and believe that He *does* hear you. But maybe you don't know all that's happening behind the scenes. Hang on like this lady did; as soon as He can be fair to everyone involved, He will give you what you need. All along, the lady knew and believed that "God is love." She wouldn't give up that idea. And second, she kept on praying. I love this story! I hope you do, too.

How the Lord Makes It Hard for Anyone to Be Lost

Suppose you forgot or were excited and you started to run out into a city street full of busy traffic: Would your mom or dad try to stop you?

Yes, because they love you with all their hearts.

Suppose someone whom the Lord loves (and that's everybody!) gets going on the road that leads to being lost at last; do you think the Lord would try to stop him?

Yes! If we get into the wrong way, don't you think He would try His best to save us from going on and being lost at last?

Yes!

We learned in another story how the Lord loved poor Saul of Tarsus when he was on the wrong road, and *hindered* him. It's not that He actually stops someone from going on down the wrong road; He gives freedom of choice to all of us. Anyone who is totally *determined to be lost can* resist the Lord's love to the bitter end. Judas Iscariot did that, and we don't want to, do we?

Sometimes I like to tell children about how great is God's love for them, by playing a little game.

When a boy is willing to play the game (let's call him Bill), I face him and ask him:

"Bill, do you see that door behind me (or if there isn't one, we pretend that there is one)?"

He says, "Yes."

"All right, let's pretend that that door is the door that goes to hell."

Bill nods.

"Then, Bill, do you see that door on the opposite side of the building, that door that is behind you (if there isn't any there we pretend there is one)?" He says, "Yes."

"Okay, that's the door that goes to heaven—that's the door behind you."

"Yes," he says.

Then I say, "Bill I know you don't want to go to hell, but just because we're playing the game, I want you to try to go to that door that goes to hell, the one behind me."

Bill grins, and stands a moment, not knowing what to do.

Then I say, "Come on, Bill; we're playing a game. Try to go!"

So Bill lunges forward, but as quickly, I block him. Then he lunges to the other side, and I quickly sidestep and block him again. I try to block him every which way he tries to go in that direction.

Finally, I grab him (this illustrates what Jesus did to Saul of Tarsus), whirl him around and give him a shove toward heaven.

Everybody laughs.

"Well," I say, "this helps us understand how actively the Holy Spirit works to put every hindrance in the way of someone who doesn't understand and goes the wrong way. The bottom line is: *God loves us more than we ever thought He does!*

One time I was invited to give a Week of Prayer in school. The floor was waxed and polished. The boy had rubber soles on his shoes. I had on ordinary leather-soled shoes. And that kid pushed me on my feet all the way to "hell."

Everybody laughed and the kids were delighted to see me defeated in my little illustration.

But I said, "The Lord let it work out this way. If someone is downright *determined to be lost*, he *can* be lost; he can overcome all the hindrances the Holy Spirit puts in His way. But we don't want to do that, do we?"

One time when God's people were fighting against Him, He said, "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" (Hosea 1 3:9, KJV). God has made it very hard for people to commit suicide, even when they're discouraged; and He has made it hard for people to destroy themselves *spiritually*, too. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy" (Matthew 11:30).

Somehow most children and youth have picked up somewhere the idea that it's hard to be saved. The idea seems to be that God is trying to do what high school students sometimes think their teacher is doing—flunk them if he can.

The idea behind such thinking is not true about our heavenly father!

Think a moment: if that idea were true, wouldn't that mean that He is a Meanie? Here He tells the world that He loves us all, then He turns around and makes it as hard as possible for us to be saved!

This is exactly the lie that Satan wants us to believe. Jesus makes things clear: "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!" (John 16:33). You have a job to do, so make up your mind to do it: believe that God's character is love; He is fair; He loves you. And let Him hold you by your hand (Isaiah 41:13) and lead you all the way into heaven.

When Margie Gave Me a Brand New Mercedes Benz

I used to drive an old Mercedes Benz. In fact, I had found it in a junk yard, and I had fixed it up because I didn't have enough money to buy a nice car ready to run.

Christmas came, and the children (grown by now) were home from college for the holidays. When Christmas morning came, there were presents for everyone.

Margie was a student in a Christian college, and she didn't have much money herself. But she had placed a little note for me about my Christmas present. It read like this: "Dear Daddy: Merry Christmas! The present I am giving you this Christmas is a brand new Mercedes Benz. I hope you like it, Love, Margie."

Well, I was surprised. A brand new Mercedes Benz for Christmas! I couldn't believe my eyes.

"Margie, you shouldn't tease your poor father like this; you know I would love to have a brand new Mercedes Benz, but this can't be true, because you can't afford to buy me a new Mercedes Benz!"

"But Daddy, it's true! I have bought you *a brand new Mercedes Benz sedan*. It's blue, metallic blue."

"Well, okay; but where is it?"

"It's outside parked in the driveway side by side next to your old Mercedes Benz." So outside I went. And sure enough—she was telling me the truth. There on the concrete driveway stood a brand new Mercedes Benz, and it was parked next to my old one.

But it was only about ten inches long. It was a cute toy; and I still have it parked in my office bookcase.

Margie and I were just having a little fun on Christmas morning. And she would never really deceive me, because she loves me.

But there is someone who would love to deceive you by promising you something as wonderful as a real brand new Mercedes Benz, but would end up giving you a miserable little counterfeit of what you really want, something that you would be sorry to have to keep forever.

One of the counterfeits that the Enemy wants to push on us is "love." There is a genuine, true love which is a precious gift from Jesus. But there is a counterfeit that is just a toy, and it is useless so far as any real happiness is concerned. It ends up making you *unhappy*.

Jesus has told us, "Watch out, don't be fooled" (Luke 21:8). "False Messiahs and false prophets will appear; they will perform great miracles and wonders in order to deceive even God's chosen people, if possible" (Matthew 24:24). One of those deceptions is false love. Children can be smart enough not to allow themselves to be deceived.

Jesus has promised to give you what He calls "eyesalve" for anointing your eyes, so you can see and not be deceived. You know, it's not literal medicine like you get in a bottle; it's the knowledge of what's right and what's wrong, which will make you like Jesus was when He was a boy. The Bible says He knew, even when very young, how "to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:14, 15, KJV). And He will make you wise as He was!

As you grow older and become a teen, you will hear this word "love" spoken sometimes. Don't ever say it if it's not true, and don't deceive others or be deceived about "love." If "it's a precious gift which we receive from Jesus," it's nothing to joke about or for us to play with counterfeits.

Aren't you glad that our Savior teaches us never to be deceived?

Where Big Folks and Little Folks Often Get It Backwards

You ask almost anyone (even some pastors!) these two questions and see how they answer: (a) "It's hard to be saved, and it's easy to be lost." Or, (b) "It's easy to be saved, and it's hard to be lost."

Which will most people say is the true answer?

Sorry, most will look very sad, get a long face, and say, "What's true is (a), Yes," and then they look so discouraged, like they're almost about to cry. "It's hard to be saved, and it's so easy to be lost. Such sad news! In order to be saved, you must do this and do that, and many other things that are difficult, and the path to heaven is rocky and steep and it's uphill all the way, and there are all kinds of roadblocks and difficult things in the way; and the path to hell is downhill all the way, smooth like sliding down ice, and if you start to be lost, Jesus just stands back and let's you go. He died for you on the cross, but from now on it's up to you."

But the News in the Bible is *much* better than that! Not only did Jesus die for us on His cross, but He *keeps on* saving us 24 hours a day and seven days a week, all the time, making His yoke easy to bear if we will only listen to Him. And more than that, He actually makes it hard for us to be lost.

But people, both grown-ups and children, don't know what He says! Let's listen to Him:

In Matthew 11:28-30 He says: "Come to Me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you ..." what do you suppose He said? "I will give you a hard time?"

No! He says, "I will give you *rest*." And He means what He says!

More than that, He says, "Take My yoke and put it on you and learn from Me." You know what a "yoke" is? It joins two oxen together so that it makes their work easy. Now they can pull heavy loads and not get so tired. The "yoke" that Jesus talks about joins you and Him together, and from then on, it's He who does the pulling. Yes, He makes life easier for us, not more difficult.

He says, "I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest." If someone gave you a big, heavy suitcase to carry, you'd get tired quickly, wouldn't you? If people don't understand how good the Good News of the Gospel is, they get so tired trying to understand all the Bad News.

Don't be afraid that Jesus is hiding something from us that will change His promise. No, *He is telling us the truth*. That "yoke" joins Him to us. He wants us to believe it.

But what does Jesus actually say about whether it's "easy" or "hard" to be lost? Lots of things: (1) His "yoke is easy." (2) "The Lord is [your] Shepherd. [You] have everything [you] need" (Psalm 23:1). (3) "Ask, and you will receive" (Matthew 7:7). (4) "Everyone who asks will receive." (5) If you ask Him for bread, He will never give you a "stone." (6) He says, "I will be with you always" (Matthew 28:20). (7) There are ten special "happy promises" in Matthew 5:3-12 for every one who spends his life listening to Jesus. To be joined with Him by the "yoke" is the easiest way.

Yes, it is backwards from the way many people think. But you know what? What Jesus says is always backward from the Bad News people are trained to believe!

Margie and the Baboons

I'm sorry, but baboons are ugly animals. I can't think of anything very nice about them. I don't know of anyone who has one for a pet.

But we have lots of them in Africa. Sometimes we would drive to the Game Reserve near Nairobi. Margie was little and of course she would be in the back seat. We would roll our windows up, because when we would stop, baboons would come and swarm all over the car, peering in our windows and through the windshield, hoping we would give them something to eat.

Sometimes they get angry and they are mean, and have been known to bite people.

Margie didn't like them. She would get down off the back seat and crouch on the floor because she was afraid. I told her, "Margie, they won't hurt you! You don't need to be afraid of them." I meant, of course, that since we have strong glass in our windshield and in our car windows, no baboon can get near her to hurt her.

One Sabbath afternoon long afterward we were all home in Nairobi, relaxing. It was a warm, sunny day. Grace and I were trying to read somewhere in the house, and Margie was in the front yard, swinging in her swing in the big pepper tree.

We didn't have a fence around our house, just a low hedge of bushes. When we looked up, to our amazement, there was a whole troop of baboons who had come in to the city from the Game Reserve nearby, and they were picking their way through our hedge. Then they all surrounded Margie who was swinging. We watched in horror! Suppose one of them got angry and began to bite her?

Quietly she let her swing go slower and slower until it stopped. We were breathless, watching. We felt that if we rushed out yelling at the baboons, they might panic and then really hurt her. Margie just sat in her swing, watching them with no trace of fear. And they seemed to ignore her, just picked at leaves or things here or there in the yard, hoping for a bug or an insect to eat.

After a few minutes, they quietly ambled off, and left Margie alone.

We rushed out to take her in our arms.

"Margie, weren't you afraid of those ugly baboons?" I asked.

"No, Daddy; you told me they wouldn't hurt me!"

Of course, when I said that to her, we were in the car in the Game Reserve. I didn't intend to tell her that if they surrounded her out in the open, they couldn't hurt her.

Because she believed what I told her, she was not afraid. Wise people say that if you are in the presence of a wild animal and you are totally not afraid, it is quite likely that it won't hurt you. If you are afraid, they sense the tension, and that puts them on edge, and then sometimes they can attack you when they are afraid.

This worked out perfectly because Margie trusted her father totally.

The Bible tells us that a time of trouble is coming on the world. But Jesus says, "Do not be worried and upset" (John 14:1). If Satan sees that we are letting ourselves be afraid, he may torment us extra, just to watch us be afraid. Jesus promised us, "I will be with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Believe Him, and you need never be afraid of Satan.

When the Wrong Kid Gets the Blame

We were doing a children's story in church, playing we were in school. Three of us were sitting in school desks on the platform, behind each other (as in school). I was the third.

Just to help the children understand something about the Book of Job in the Bible, I got a long thin stick and under the seat of the boy ahead of me I stuck my long stick ahead to the boy who was sitting two seats ahead of me. The one sitting just ahead of me didn't know what I was doing, because he couldn't see underneath his seat. When I pricked the third one in front, he naturally looked around at the second one behind him, and said, "Stop it!" "I didn't do it!" he said.

So I pricked the third one again with my long stick.

The one ahead of me couldn't understand—he really *hadn't* done anything! The "bad guy" was me—hiding in the background.

Now don't try this on anyone, for you might get yourself in trouble. But it explains one of the most important books in the Bible that lots of people don't understand.

The Book of Job tells about a very good man who did everything right. He was the best man in the world at that time. He was very rich, with seven thousand sheep, a thousand oxen, five hundred donkeys, and three thousand camels. And he had seven sons and three daughters

Then he started having troubles like it was hard to believe. One day while they were all having a feast, a messenger came running in to tell Job that some wicked terrorists had stolen the valuable oxen while they were plowing, and the donkeys, and then had also killed the servants. Bad news!

Then another messenger brought in word that a lightning bolt had "burned up the sheep, and the servants" also. Still worse news.

Then almost immediately, another servant came running in with the news that some more terrorists had captured all his valuable camels—and again had killed the servants.

You'd think this was news so bad no one could stand any more like it. But another man came running in to tell how his seven sons and three daughters were having a party and a terrible cyclone blew the house down and all his children were killed in the crash.

This is the story of Job, in the Bible. Then afterward Job became sick with strange boils all over his body. The whole book is about who did all this to poor Job. If God did it, that would mean that God is not very nice.

Three friends came to comfort him; they thought God did it all because Job must have done some terrible sin (which was not true). And they bothered him until he thought their bad news was worse than all the other troubles that had come upon him.

But neither Job nor his friends knew the story behind all this.

Just like I was pricking the boy three seats ahead of me and he didn't know who was doing it, Job didn't know that in fact *it was Satan doing all this behind the scenes.*

In a meeting with God, Satan had claimed that no one serves God for an unselfish reason. Everybody wants a reward, or doesn't want to be punished. Torture Job like this, Satan said, and he will curse God. *Job proved that Satan was wrong.* He never lost his faith in God. That makes him, next to Jesus Christ, the most important man who ever lived!

All the troubles in the world today are not God's fault; *they are Satan's, who is behind the scenes doing it.* And you and I can help Job prove that Satan is wrong, wrong, wrong! No matter what trouble may come upon us, we can choose to believe that God is good and He loves us.

Who Holds Whose Hand?

When I preach to people and tell a children's story, I like to play a game. I ask for some little girl to volunteer to play the game with me, someone maybe about 6 or 7 years old.

Then I tell her carefully what we're going to do (let's say her name is Ruth):

"Ruth, we'll just go for a walk together, that's all! We'll walk down the aisle here in the church, and you hold my hand. Okay?"

She agrees, and so I hold out my hand, and she takes it, smiling, wondering what's going to happen. All the people also are wondering what we're up to.

Then, with everybody watching us closely, and the two of us facing the crowd, I start off.

And do I go! I don't run (I promised her we'd go for *a walk* together), but I walk like I want to get somewhere.

And of course, it always happens: she wasn't holding on! I leave her way behind.

When I turn around and come back, she's standing there, wondering what went wrong.

Then I say, "Ruth, what happened to you? We were supposed to go for a walk *together!*"

"I couldn't hold on!" she says.

"All right," I say. "But now let's do it differently. Let's go for a walk *together*, you and I, but this time instead of you holding on to my hand, I'm going to change things, and hold on to *your* hand."

Well, you know what always happens. I hold her tight as we take off. And everybody laughs, She does, too.

Everybody in the whole world is too weak to hold on tight to Jesus' hand. The Bible says something interesting when it comes to our holding on to His hand: "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, NKJV).

How strong is someone who is "*without strength*"? That's why God is not asking us to promise Him that we're going to do everything just right forever; the apostle Peter promised that he would never deny Jesus; *but that same night he denied Him three times*. No, our human promises are not strong.

But what *is* strong, is the hand of Jesus. He has promised something wonderful. It's in Isaiah 41:10,13, and we're going to be happy people forever if we believe His promise: "Do not be afraid—I am with you! I am your God—let nothing terrify you! I will make you strong and help you; I will protect you and save you." The King James Version says, "I will hold thy right hand."

Everything depends on *who holds whose hand!*

Aren't you glad that He has promised always to hold *your* hand?

Now, your job is to *let Him* hold your hand! Don't wriggle your hand out of His hand like an ornery child trying to get away from his parents. Let me tell you a secret: every time Satan tempts you to do or say wrong, you will remember this. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus will give your hand a special little tug to encourage you. *Don't break away from Him!*

How to Make a Lot of Money (but maybe I'm wrong!)

I've had this idea how boys and girls can make a lot of money, and it would be easy—if it worked. Let me explain my idea, then you think about it and decide if you want to try it:

(1) You know how people buy Christmas trees before Christmas, even up to Christmas Eve. Sometimes people spend as much as \$50 for a really nice tree.

(2) They put it up in their house, decorate it, and there it is with its lights. It's beautiful.

(3) Then Christmas comes, everybody opens their presents, and then a couple days after Christmas, the tree becomes a nuisance. They want to get rid of it.

(4) Usually by New Year's Eve, they have carried that beautiful, expensive Christmas tree out and dumped it on the sidewalk so the truck can cart it away.

(5) Now, here's my idea. You see if it will work—if you can make a lot of money this way:

(6) You pick up those trees (they'll be glad to have you carry them away), and then you go door to door, ring the doorbells, and tell the people something like this:

"Hello, I'm So-and-so. I have a great bargain for you. I am selling Christmas trees for a lot less than they were just a few weeks ago. This beautiful tree probably cost \$40 to \$50, and I can sell it to you today for half that price. Look, you can see, it's as good as new. Wouldn't you like to buy it at this great saving?"

Well, what do you think?

If you are big enough to go door-to-door and ring people's doorbells, I think you have already decided that my idea just won't work. You are smarter than I am!

It's not that the trees aren't still nice, for they are still beautiful; and it's not that they didn't cost a lot of money at first. They did. The problem is that *the time* for Christmas trees is over, it's finished; nobody wants to buy Christmas trees now since Christmas has *already passed*.

The point is this: *there is a time for this or that, and when that time has passed, it's not time for that any more.*

And there is a time for us to give our heart to Jesus, to respond to His call.

There is a time for Him to call us by His Holy Spirit; and there is a time when He no longer calls. It's like a special sale that is on. If you want the bargain, you must go before the sale is over.

The Bible tells us about that: "When the time comes to save you, I will show you favor" (Isaiah 49:8). And this is repeated in the New Testament like this: "When the time came for Me to show you favor, I heard you, I helped you. Listen! This is the hour to receive God's favor; today is the day to be saved!" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Yes, yes! The Holy Spirit is speaking to your hearts today. "Listen!" Say "Yes!" to Him *now*. You will make Him very happy; and He will make you very happy.

When the Mbwa Flies Wanted to Eat Us Up

It happened in Uganda, in East Africa. And it was right by the Nile River. It was a dark night (that made it all worse). We were in trouble! And it was long ago.

But first, let me tell what happened.

I was way out in the country, far from home, visiting our little Nawanende School where we had a boarding dormitory for boys. It was a grass-roofed mud building. No nice bathrooms, no running water.

One day I took one of the teachers with me to the town of Jinja to buy some supplies for the school. My car was that old Model A Ford touring car that was so weak it couldn't climb hills easily, and its brakes were almost no good. (Remember? The car with the dirty black oil.)

We spent a lot of time in Jinja buying the things we needed. One thing was soap for the dorm. It was not like any soap you have ever seen: it came in long bars about two feet long, and it was a little bit spongy, not hard like your bathroom bars of soap. (That was a blessing, as you will soon see.)

We also bought some empty "debbes," big five-gallon cans that boys in the school use to carry water up from the swamp (you see, out there at Nawanende we had no water faucets as you have). And those debbes were a blessing too, as you will see.

We put all these debbes and bars of soap in the back seat, and started off for the long drive back to Nawanende. It was getting late in the evening.

And then of course, the sun went down; and since there is little twilight at the Equator, it soon got pitch dark.

All went well because we had headlights on the old Ford and we were going along fine until we were going down a hill on this winding dirt road. Around a curve, there was a herd of black cows smack in the middle of the road. The man in charge of the cows had a kerosene lantern and it was lit, but he was *in front* of the black cows, so I couldn't see him or his lamp until it was too late. I tried to push down on the brake pedal as hard as I could, but all it did was to slow the Ford down a bit, and we plowed straight into that herd of cows. (Now, don't worry about the cows. Later I used my flashlight and saw that none were seriously hurt.) But our poor little Ford *was!*

Both of the headlights were pushed back so that they pointed up to the stars. One of the cow's horns had punched two big holes right through the radiator so that all the water gushed out. (You know, a radiator is where the engine keeps its water to keep it from getting too hot.) And that meant of course that we couldn't drive the car any more. And remember, this is in Africa right out in the country where there were no Motel 6s, no filling stations, no garages. In fact no people lived there at all, nothing but jungle-like bushes. And no other cars came that night on that desolate road.

The reason why nobody lived there was the "mbwa flies." It was near the Nile River. "Mbwa" means "dog" in that language. These tiny insects were there in millions, it seemed, in my hair, in my nose, in my eyes, buzzing in my ears, all over me. As fast as you swatted them, more came. And when they bit you, they drew blood. There was no place where we could go. I realized that if we stayed there for the night, we might not even be alive next morning. What to do? It was dark, and no Ford that ran.

We did have a flashlight—oh, what a blessing! We pulled the mangled radiator back off the engine where it had been pushed. I took one of those big bars of soap and stuffed it into the two holes, and I asked the teacher to run down to the river and bring up a debbe full of water. We poured that in the radiator, and with the teacher sitting on the front fender holding the flashlight instead of a headlight, we started off. It wasn't long of course until the soap melted and all the water ran out again. So we stopped, the teacher ran to get another debbe full of water, I stuffed more soap into the two holes, and off we went again. Finally, long after midnight we crawled into Nawanende.

Now why am I telling you this crazy story, even though it's true?

- (1) Before you go to sleep tonight, kneel down and thank the heavenly Father that you don't have to live on the banks of the Nile River where the mbwa flies are.
- (2) Thank Him too that your parents have a good car with brakes that work.
- (3) Thank Him too that it has headlights that don't point up to the stars.

(4) Thank Him too that when you need some water, you can just turn on a faucet and there it is. Lots of people in Africa still have to carry it from the swamp in five-gallon tins on their heads!

(5) And thank Him, of course, that He has been with you all your life up until now. He is your Savior!

And please remember—our very life, even the next breath that we breathe, has been bought for us, given to us *as a gift* that we don't deserve, because of the sacrifice of the Son of God when He died in our place on His cross. When the Bible tells us "Christ died for our sins," it means He died *instead of* us (1 Corinthians 15:3). All we have we owe to Him!

The Broken Stone Story

Long ago a faithful missionary wanted to give the gospel to a tribe of people in South America who at that time didn't know how to read. Pastor Stahl had preached to them, and they could see he was kind and he loved them. They wanted him to stay and teach them the truth about God and His word, the Bible.

But he couldn't stay with them. So he promised them he would send a teacher who would come in his stead, and teach them the same Good News message he had been teaching.

But then they began thinking. How could they know that someone coming who says he is sent by Pastor Stahl is really the true one? How could they be sure they would not be deceived? If he wrote a letter and even signed it, they couldn't read it; so how could they know, they asked him.

Pastor Stahl thought a few moments, wondering what to do. Then he got an idea—that the Holy Spirit must have given him.

He picked up an ordinary stone. Then he cracked it into two pieces. He gave one half to the chief of the tribe who wanted a teacher to come. "Chief," said Pastor Stahl, "I will give my half of this broken stone to the teacher whom I send. Then when he comes, you can put the two halves together. No other stone in all the world will fit this broken half!" It was a brilliant idea, don't you think? The people were happy.

Did you know that you yourself are also one half of a broken stone, and the other half is Jesus Himself? If you have a broken stone, you can look all over the world and never find another half that fits perfectly, except that one true half. You are different than any other person. God has created you special; He knows all about your habits and the things about you that are so different from anyone else. He even knows all your thoughts and your secret feelings that no one else, not even your parents, can know. Psalm 139 says: "Lord, You have examined me and You know me. ... from far away You understand all my thoughts. You see me whether I am working or resting ... even before I speak, You know what I will say. You are all around me on every side. ... Your knowledge of me is too deep ... Where could I go to escape from you? ... Even darkness is not dark to You" (Psalm 139:1 - 12).

The one Person who understands you so fully is the other Half of the "broken stone" that is you—Jesus Christ. And even though He knows all about you, He still loves you and respects you. He trusts you. He still believes in you, that you will become the wonderful person that He has called you to be.

When you pray to the Father in Jesus' name, He understands you. Nobody else can, because Jesus has told us, "When you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). The King James Bible says it a little clearer: "Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

The Father and Jesus are one, for the Bible says that there is one God. So when the Father is your Friend, be sure that Jesus is your Friend. You have a "secret" with Him! No one else can get in on it. That's exciting, isn't it? And even though He knows all that you do and say in secret, He still loves you because He forgives. He is teaching you to obey Him as though you were the only person in the world. He is the One True Friend you will always have.

Would You Like to Be a Tumbleweed?

You see them sometimes in Africa (well, other places, too). When the rains water the thirsty ground, little seeds sprout and then the tumbleweed becomes a big plant.

The rains stop, and the big tumbleweed gets dry. Soon the tumbleweed's root snaps, and the wind tosses the big almost-light-as-a-feather weed everywhere, this way or that. It has nothing to hold it, nothing to tie it down to the root that once caused it to grow. Sometimes when you're driving down the highway, this huge tumbleweed sails across just in front of you, to lodge helplessly up against some fence. It's world famous for being blown this way or that!

No matter how hard the wind blows, a healthy plant just stays put where it grew up. Then when the wind finally stops, it just stays there happy.

People young and old have a problem with wind blowing—standing alone when the crowd around them is blowing the wrong way. Peter had that exactly same problem. The crowd around him were blowing against Jesus, laughing and ridiculing Him. Peter *felt* alone. He wished he could just mingle in with the crowd; he didn't want to be laughed at. Why did he feel so alone? He had separated himself from Jesus.

Peter became a moral tumbleweed, tossed by the wind of this fickle crowd of godless people. That's when he made that awful mistake of denying Jesus three times. He didn't really want to do it, but it was because he had cut himself off from his root.

He didn't know it, but the whole world *was* watching him—the Father in heaven, all the holy angels, too (they were crying, I am sure), *and we*. Peter was wrong to feel like he was alone against a great crowd of people. *All the good people in the world were standing with him*, and all the holy angels, too. But he didn't believe that. When he denied Jesus, he separated himself from all those good people and holy angels.

Someday you will think you're alone in school, in your classroom, or even at church, or in a Bible study class. *You won't be alone*. It looks backwards, but it's true: those who deny Jesus are the small group; those who are loyal to Him are the far bigger group watching you.

All this time He has been strengthening you so your "root" will go down deep into the earth.

Then when the wind blows, yes, if even a hurricane blows you, you will stand firm!

And then you will be so happy!

In the great kingdom of heaven in eternity, you will someday meet Peter face to face. He will not try to hide anything; he will tell you honestly that he had denied Jesus in a weak moment. But he will shake your hand and he will thank you for learning from his mistake, since you stood up firm and free, not afraid of the crowd, and stood loyal to Christ!

How Can You Teach Your Dog to Do a Trick?

You probably can't, for he won't want to learn unless you reward him every time he does it. Watch closely: When you see people showing off their pets who do these funny things, they always slip the pet a little treat. Even horses or other big animals won't learn unless you reward them with something special each time.

That makes us ask, *Why do we serve Jesus?* Is it because we'll get a reward? Why do we keep the Sabbath? Pay our tithe? Go to church? Get baptized? Become missionaries? Most people will confess, "It's because I want to go to heaven. I don't want to be lost." And of course those are *good* reasons; nobody wants to be lost at last.

Be honest with yourself.

Let's hope you help at home to keep your house clean and running. You do your part washing the dishes, vacuuming the rug, taking out the garbage, washing the car, mowing the lawn—whatever. Do you pout if your parents don't give you a special treat for doing it? I hope not! I hope you are ready and willing and cheerful when it comes your turn to help—all simply because you love your parents and you love others in the home, and because you know it's the right thing to do whether you get any special reward or not. (To tell the truth, you can't *be* happy at home unless that is the reason why you help!)

Do you think your parents could be happy if they knew that the only reason you do anything is to get paid for it?

Let's not forget: Jesus Christ is a real person.

He has feelings like we have. He can be hurt, just as we can. We can make Him happy or we can cause Him pain.

He has done something that makes the world marvel because no one else since time began has done it. *He has died our second death in our place.* He gave Himself with no idea of getting a reward for doing so. When He died our "second death" (as the Bible describes it, Revelation 2:11), that meant He had given up all thought of a reward.

Someone very wise has told us that as He hung on His cross, He could not see through the gates of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave as a reward for suffering and dying in our place. When He chose to die for us, it was to be goodbye forever. (That is love!). Isaiah tells us that "He hath poured out His soul unto death" like you turn a bottle upside down and drain every drop out of it (53:12, KJV).

But at the end of His suffering on the cross, He was happy, and His face lighted up like the sun when He shouted, "It is finished!" But what made Him so happy was not that He thought *He* would get some reward in heaven; He had given all that up. What made Him happy was that *you and I will live forever!* [Psalm 22 makes that clear.]

Honestly, this is a love like nobody else in the world had ever thought of! And this is the secret reason why so many people have wanted to give everything to Jesus!

In these last days God is preparing many people who are learning to understand the love of Christ, which moves them to follow Him. What they have is a new reason or motivation—moved by His love, not moved by fear.

And among those people, there are many children. They are as important as any grown-ups. You are one, aren't you?

The Elephant That Needed the Dentist

The elephants we see in zoos are usually gentle animals that walk around slowly, and act like somebody who is at peace with the world. Have you ever seen one that was angry and wild?

This elephant lived in Uganda, in East Africa. And was he angry! He was flailing around this way and that way, flapping his enormous ears wildly, and trumpeting so loud that you could hear him from far away. He was acting like he would threaten anyone who came close, starting at you as though he was attacking you. Then he would back off, and start in a different direction.

It wouldn't have been so bad if this were happening in some remote place, but this was in the middle of the main highway from Kampala to Fort Portal, in Western Uganda. The cars going east had to stop because he acted like he would jump on them if they came closer. And the cars going west had to stop, too, for the same reason. There he was, this enormous elephant taking over the main highway in Uganda. And having a temper tantrum!

The people stopped there said that someone must go and get the game warden. So someone turned his car around and went back to Kampala to tell him. He came in his Land Rover, but there was nothing he could do to calm down this huge beast. Finally, very sorrowfully, as a last resort, he decided he must shoot this strange elephant because he was a threat to everybody. The animal seemed out of its mind.

Can you guess what the problem was? Was he really a rogue animal, a bad one?

No. When the game warden examined him as he lay dead on the grass, he found that he had an abscessed tooth that had been hurting him badly. Probably he had never before had an abscessed tooth in his life. As the people were watching his anger all this time, nobody guessed what his real problem was. If only some dentist could have helped him (of course, no dentist could do that on an elephant!), then the once angry elephant would have calmed down and been as gentle as any other elephant.

Have you ever seen a person who was very angry, and you were afraid to be near him? Maybe you have thought that person was just a bad person. It's possible that there was something in his (or her) life that perplexed him, something that had brought him much pain, and he could never understand why God had permitted it to happen to him. The Bible says, "A person becomes an enemy of God when he is controlled by his human nature; for he does not obey God's law, and in fact, he cannot obey it" (Romans 8:7). Many people can't understand why they are like they are. And we don't want to make the mistake of thinking they are hopeless, when in fact if they only could understand the Gospel of God's love, their "toothache" of heart would be healed.

It's possible that person was not at heart intending to be a mean or bad person. Let's not judge someone without knowing why he seems to be so angry.

There was nothing the game warden could have said to the angry elephant to "convert" him, sorry. But if you or I could give some Good News from Jesus to the person whom we don't understand, it's very possible that we can bring healing to him. People hurt, just like that elephant hurt. And Jesus is the world's great physician. A wounded heart can hurt more than an abscessed tooth; what heals is the truth of how much the Lord Jesus loves us and thinks about us.

I doubt that when you grow up you would want to become an animal doctor to try to heal angry but sick elephants; but I do hope that you will choose to learn from Jesus how to heal people who are sick at heart.

How Do Angels Get Us to Listen?

It was Sabbath afternoon in Kenya, East Africa. We had been to Sabbath School and the worship service. Now it was a bright sunny afternoon. We drove to Thika Falls.

We found a delightful place down where the Thika River flows over the rocks. It has just plunged over a cliff. That's why it's called Thika Falls. The roar of the waterfall is so loud you have to shout to be heard.

The boys, Bob and John, were old enough to go off walking ahead along the trail up the river, while Grace and Margie and I stayed behind (Margie was about four). We just wanted to rest awhile and read a good book. There was no one else anywhere around. We were all alone in this beautiful place.

Grace and I were sitting on top of a huge rock that jutted out into the river, each reading a book. Margie was happy to wade in the water next to our big rock.

All went well until above the noise of the waterfall, Grace suddenly cried out, "Where's Margie?"

We looked around; *she was nowhere to be seen*. I jumped down and ran a bit up the river looking for her, thinking maybe while we were reading she could have wandered off. Nowhere to be seen.

Grace also jumped down off the big rock we were sitting on. To this day she doesn't know why she did it, but there at the foot of that big rock as it jutted out into the river, Grace put her hand down into that dark water, and guess what she felt?

There was Margie's hand, reaching out above her head, waving her hand in the water. She had suddenly slid down into what was a big hole that we didn't know was there, deeper than she was tall, so that her waving hand was just a few inches below the top of the water. You couldn't see it. Grace pulled her up.

She hadn't taken a breath yet, for the water was icy cold. There was nothing Margie could have done to save herself, for the hole just went down steep and she couldn't have climbed out, for there was nothing she could have held on to.

Grace says that she heard no voice of an angel telling her to look up and see that Margie wasn't there anymore. The noise of the waterfall was so loud that we couldn't have heard anything. The two of us could have just kept on reading our books, knowing nothing until little Margie could have drowned down in that icy water.

Did an angel say something to Grace? Grace says she didn't hear anything; but some angel must have prompted her to think—"Where's Margie?" just in time.

The Lord does not love us any better than He loves anybody else. That's for sure. He loves us all alike. But we had done something that, sad to say, many families don't do: we had had "family worship" that morning. Family worship is when daddy, mother, and the children spend a little time together reading a story from the Bible, and then getting on their knees to pray. They thank our Heavenly Father for His blessings, and ask Him to send an angel to guard us as we enter our new day. "His angel guards those who have reverence for the Lord and rescues them from danger" (Psalm 34:7).

Yes, it was an angel who somehow in a way only he knows gave to Grace that sudden realization: "Where's Margie?" She wasn't where we had left her! Thank You, Father, for sending us an angel!

And it was to my wife that the angel was able to send that strange message—not to me. That makes me humble even to think about it.

The Story of How Something Hard Becomes Easy

When God says something, He uses words that children can understand. For instance, take the word "covenant." Children have a word that many think is the same—the word "bargain." For example, let's say I have a new skateboard. I tell you, "I'll sell it to you for a dollar." You say, "Okay, I'll buy it. I'll give you a dollar for it." So we agree on the deal. We say, "We've made a bargain. I'll do my part (that is, give you the skateboard)." You say, "I'll do my part (that is, pay the dollar)."

Grownups call that a "covenant." It's very easy to understand. And the Bible tells of *two* covenants. One is that we *think* we have made a bargain with God. Let's look at the one that is called the "old" covenant. That was the "bargain" that God's people made *with Him* at a place called Mount Sinai, on their way to their wonderful Promised Land.

The bargain they thought they made with God was this: For His part, He would give them this Promised Land and many blessings to go with it—including salvation from sin and eternal life. For their part, the people would give Him something—they promised that they would be faithful to keep all His commandments perfectly; they said, "We will do everything that the Lord has said" (Exodus 19:7). This should make God happy, they thought. This "bargain" or agreement became the "old covenant."

That should be a good "bargain," many people think.

The people would get the Promised Land and everlasting life to go with it. God would get their perfect obedience. But there was a problem: the people didn't keep their end of the "bargain."

They broke God's commandments. In just a few days, they gave up everything and made a golden calf, knelt down, worshipped it, and got themselves into a wild party where they forgot all about God and His commandments.

The problem was that they *could not* keep their promise, even though they may have wanted to and promised to. We human beings have all been born separated from God. We're like a branch of an apple tree that has been broken off. Any little apples on the broken branch die.

The Bible says that of ourselves, we are so separated from Him that it's impossible for us on our own to keep His commandments. So if we promise ever so faithfully, and keep promising for a thousand years that we will keep all His commandments perfectly, people have always ended up failing to do so. Our very nature is evil. We need to be born again. We need a new heart.

But God had already done the right thing, and had made a "new covenant" that was already perfect. The people had just forgotten about it, or had dis-believed it.

When God makes a covenant with us, it's not a "bargain" like you and I agreeing on the skateboard. When God has a "skateboard" that He wants us to have, He doesn't make "a bargain" with us about it, or an agreement that if we will do something, then He will do something. He just gives us the skateboard straight out—a *gift*. No promises, no bargain of any kind, on our part. It's totally a gift on His part. That's the way God likes to do things. Did you promise God anything before you came out of the womb to be born? No, you simply were born. Period.

But that doesn't mean that we have nothing to do on our part. When we understand that He has given everything, including Himself, for us to be saved, then we can't say "Thank You!" enough. Our hearts are so fully changed that from now on *we want to keep His commandments perfectly*. It becomes our greatest joy to obey. That's the wonderful thing that the New Covenant does for those who will believe God's promises.

Why the New Covenant Is the Happiest Way to Live

God called Abraham and made great promises to him and to his children's children forever. Abraham did his part—which was not to do some great work, *but to believe what God has promised*. And anyone in all the world who believes them as he did, also will become one of Abraham's "children." And he gets in on all these wonderful things.

God would bless Abraham so he would become a great man. God would make him happy forever. Abraham would become a famous man. Wherever he should go anywhere in the world, Abraham would be a blessing to other people. People who were kind to Abraham, God would especially bless them. God Himself would fight against anyone who opposed Abraham; and best of all, through Abraham's children's children *Jesus would come to save the whole world*. All this is the promises in the New Covenant.

What God wanted His people to do when they got to Mount Sinai was to *believe* those same promises He made to Abraham as he believed them. God knew that those who believe as Abraham believed would become like him in character, and therefore be his true children. Better still, those who believe God's promises really become *like Jesus* in character. It's called "faith which works." Believing God's promises changes the heart, because you are so happy to be one with Him and to have this wonderful hope in your heart, you *want* to keep all His commandments. And that means, of course that now you hate sin, because that was what crucified Jesus.

When you believe God's new covenant, you stop worrying about yourself. It's like stepping out of a dungeon into bright sunshine. It's like a bird soaring above the mountains, free. It's like a prisoner getting out of jail. You stop worrying about what other children think of you, whether your clothes are as nice, for example, or whether you are as pretty or as handsome as someone else. Poor people who believe God's "new covenant" promises are happier than rich people who don't.

When you believe God's new covenant promises, you are free from any fear about what color you are, or where you live, or what kind of car your dad drives, or what kind of house you live in. You are Abraham's child "in Christ," which means that all those promises to Abraham are now yours. You may not have a dime in your pocket to spend, but you are a multi-billionaire "in Christ." You know that He will never forget you or forsake you. He will hold your hand forever.

When you believe the new covenant promises, you become like David was when he was a child and wrote the 23rd Psalm, which says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.... Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." David didn't promise God anything in that Psalm; he simply *believed the Lord's promises to him*, that He is his shepherd and He would care for him forever, and he would "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

You know you have a heavenly Father who will love you forever. And of course, you will want to obey His commandments, for they are "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25).

Some grown-ups think that children can't understand the New Covenant. But you know they can, don't you?

The Little Boy Who Trampled Satan Under Foot

One day in Kenya, East Africa, I was outdoors and saw a huge African Black Mamba heading straight for me. I was standing just outside the back door of my friend's house where I was visiting. He yelled to me to grab a club that he kept behind the door. I barely had time to get it when that poisonous snake was right before me, its head held high ready to attack.

I had never done this before in my life, but I beat that snake furiously with that club. It was either the snake dies or I die! If he had gotten to me first, I would have been finished. I beat him on the head so hard that he died. When it was over, I felt like a hero! I think I walked on cloud nine for a week.

Long ago in the beginning when Satan had rebelled against God and led our first parents, Adam and Eve to sin, God promised something wonderful. He told Satan that Someone would come who would trample him underfoot. Eve's "offspring [Jesus] will crush your head" (Genesis 3:15). *Jesus came and He did it.* And when He stomped all over Satan, He stomped all over Satan's evil angels, too. And yes, it *was* a little Boy who did it. Let's see *how* He did it.

When Jesus grew up, He told us that we can trample on Satan, too; and if we don't do it, Satan will trample over us. And we don't want that, do we? We all must choose one or the other. We are in a great war—we can't sit in the bleachers and just watch. And children are as important as grown-ups; they choose also, and Jesus invites you to join Him in stomping Satan underfoot.

It wasn't only on His cross that Jesus saved the world.

He started doing it when He was only a Baby. When the Bible speaks of Jesus' birth, it says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, KJV).

How could a Baby have all those great names? It's because He was the Son of God as well as "our" son. His Father was God, but He is also "*our* heavenly Father" because of Jesus.

But notice what it says about Him when He was only a Baby: "The government shall be upon His shoulder." No other baby in all the world has ever had such a burden laid on his shoulder! In the United States, we are not allowed to lay "the government" upon the "shoulder" of any man (that is, to become President) who is younger than 35. But here the "government" is laid upon the "shoulder" of a Baby! Grown-ups become very quiet when they think about this. It's something marvelous.

There is a great war going on between the "government" of God, and Satan with his evil angels. It's not fought with guns and tanks; it's the battle behind all other battles. It's with sin, and every human heart is the battlefield. The heart of Jesus, when He was a boy, was included too. He couldn't sit on the bleachers either, for He was down there in the arena fighting to overcome sin once for all. Satan had invented sin and claimed that it was so strong no one could overcome it. This proved, he said, that he was stronger and better than God. And Jesus had to prove he was wrong, or the universe itself would come apart!

If Satan had gotten Jesus as even a Baby to say or do something selfish, then he would have won this great war. No one knows how a little baby can choose to be selfish or unselfish, but we do know that all of us have been born self-centered by nature. Jesus as a Baby was tempted to be selfish just as much as any of us are tempted, but He always chose to be unselfish.

As a Child, He knew all our temptations to be lazy, to do or say wrong things. He "took" the same nature we have inherited from our fallen great-great-great grandfather Adam. Of course, the "battles" that He fought as an infant were those of an infant. But as He grew up, the battles became harder and harder. It was always a battle with "self." Where we have lost our battles with self, He won.

He says, "I am not trying to do what I want, but only what He who sent Me wants" (that means, His Father). "I have come down from heaven to do not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30; 6:38).

Does this mean that all His life on earth Jesus had to work hard? Never had any fun? Always fighting battles? We know He had fun, for He loved doing the good things that make us

happy. But yes, He always was on His guard not to let Satan capture Him. And yes, we have a Savior who once was a Baby, and even then He won all His battles with Satan! Children who read the Bible can easily find the places where Jesus invites them to follow Him: "Jesus said, 'Let the children come to Me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Matthew 19:13, 14). And then there is the last page of the Bible; it was probably the first page of the entire Bible that I ever read when I was a child: "The [Holy] Spirit and the Bride, say, 'Come!' Everyone who hears this must say, 'Come!' Come, whoever is thirsty, accept the water of life as a gift, whoever wants it" (Revelation 22:17).

The Battle Jesus Won When He Was Only 12

For the first time in his life, Jesus left His hometown of Nazareth and walked the 80-some miles to Jerusalem. He must have loved the trip, for it was springtime and all the flowers were in bloom. He always loved being outdoors. Even today, it's loads more fun that sitting watching TV.

He made this long walking trip to attend the Passover because He wanted to watch the priests kill the innocent little creature that was called the Passover lamb.

He asked what it meant, why were they doing it, but nobody could tell Him. Not even Mary, His mother.

As He watched, an idea came to Him. The Passover lamb couldn't save anyone by its death; its blood was animal blood; couldn't wash away even one tiny little sin. This was only a kindergarten "sandbox" kind of lesson. The little lamb represented Somebody very important who would come to die for *the world*. Someone was to become the "Lamb of God." The priests all said that sin could not be forgiven unless the lamb dies, and that was true; but Jesus thought it all through. He understood that when that One comes who is to be the *real* Lamb of God, He too must die instead of all the people dying. He would put an end to all animals being killed for sin.

Then Jesus began to realize that the Father was calling *Him* to become the Lamb of God! Can you imagine a Boy of 12 thinking things like that? He chose to say "Yes!" to that call. Yes, He will grow up to say always, "Yes!" to His Father's will and to say "No!" to His own will. This was when He told His parents, "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49, KJV). Big load for a Boy to carry!

No other 12-year-old child has ever done that. The "government" was on His "shoulder," and He bore the heavy load. Isaiah says, "He endured the suffering that should have been ours. ... Because of our sins He was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment He suffered, made whole by the blows He received" (Isaiah 53:4, 5).

Oh, how Satan hated Him! Time and again, the Enemy tried to trick Him into doing or saying something selfish, but Jesus defeated Satan every time, right down to the end when on His cross He said No! to the last temptation of Satan. The point is that Jesus *won* the great battle! This is how He trampled Satan underfoot. And He started doing it even when He was only a Child!

Muslims tell us that when Jesus died on His cross, He died a sad, defeated Man. But they are mistaken. When He finally cried with a loud voice, "It is finished!" His face was shining like the sun. He died so happy, knowing that because He won the victory, you and I will live forever in God's everlasting kingdom.

Psalms 22 tells what happened in those last few moments. He knew that "all nations will remember the Lord. From every part of the world they will turn to Him. ... The Lord is king." He died shouting, the great Battle is won! (See Psalm 22:27, 28.) He sang a song of victory as He drew His last breath. Then He bowed His head and died.

When the priests in the temple would kill the Passover lamb, it never came to life again; it was dead forever. Jesus knew that the real Lamb of God when He comes *must truly* die—not just go to sleep for a weekend and then live again as though nothing had happened. The Lamb of God must make a total, complete sacrifice of Himself, if anybody anywhere in the world could be saved from everlasting death. When Jesus died, He wasn't thinking about being resurrected. He was glad that we would live forever!

Today people all over the world are making their choice to serve Him because of love. They are the happiest people. They choose all the time to say "No!" to Satan, and to say "Yes!" to the Holy Spirit. They are those 144,000 people* who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes. ... They are faultless" (Revelation 14:4, 5). It's not that they are better than other people for they were born with the same sinful, self-centered nature we all have. But they have chosen to let Jesus save them from sinning.

You make that same choice, too, don't you?

* This looks or sounds like a big number of people, but it's very small compared to the big population of the world. No one knows whether it's a literal number, or whether it's a

number that stands for a much larger number. Of course, we all hope that Jesus will find very many people ready when He comes the second time.

How My Wrecked Volkswagen “Bug” Was “Converted”

Once upon a time in Africa I needed a good car, but I didn't have the money to buy a nice one. Then I discovered that the Japanese Consulate in Nairobi had wrecked their brand new blue Volkswagen sedan. It had turned over on the road to Thika. It looked awful! The top was bashed in, the windshield was broken, the left door was bent out of shape, the left front fender was mangled; and the front wheel was bent in.

But they were selling the wreck cheap, so I bought it. It was a new car. I had an African help me. We welded a new top on. I bought a second-hand door and fender and wheel and put them on. Then the African and I painted the car the same blue it was when it was new. When we finished, you couldn't tell it from a new VW just off the showroom floor. And of course the engine and everything was new. It ran perfectly.

The wreck was “converted” to be a new VW again. You would not have laughed at me if you had seen me driving it. You would have thought I was driving a new car! I think I enjoyed driving that VW more than if I had had the money to put down to buy a brand new one from the factory. *I had restored this one!* That made it special for me.

Don't ever think that anybody is a wreck that can't be “converted!” I felt just a little bit proud of myself for restoring that banged up VW. Then I got to thinking about how Jesus rebuilds ruined people.

It's what He loves to do most. Of course He loves sinless angels who have never fallen into sin like we humans have done. But I think He has a special love for some human being like you and me who was lost, someone who made a mess of his life, maybe became an alcoholic or a drug addict or even a criminal, someone who had lost all hope and thought he was doomed to die forever as a wreck.

When such a person hears the Good News of the gospel of Jesus and his heart takes hold of it, a change comes over that person from top to bottom. People who saw that alcoholic lying in the gutter may have thought, “There's a hopeless person!” but they are surprised when that person is delivered from the sins and addictions that have held him, and becomes a new and free person “in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus tells us that when the news is sent to Heaven of such a transformation, all the holy angels break out into song, they are so happy. It's like when the Good Shepherd finally found His sheep that was lost. He tells His friends, “Let us celebrate!” In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:4-7).

Yes, I could see 99 perfect VW “bugs” going by on the highway every day; so what? But I had saved *ONE* from the horror of being left in the dreary junkyard forever! That one was special.

I think I will never forget how nice it looked and how perfectly it ran when I had finished with it! Yes, I am happy just telling you the story about it. And Jesus will tell everybody forever how happy He is that He saved you and me from a far worse “junkyard.”

Anyone who turns away from Him wrecks his life more than my VW was wrecked. Stay out of the world's “junkyard.”

Has Jesus Done Anything For You?

When I was a little boy, I didn't know how to swim. But I wanted to paddle around in the lake not far from our house. My brother was 6 years older than I, and he knew how, and he wanted to try to teach me how.

We didn't know it, but the city had done some dredging in that lake. You couldn't see the deep dredge holes, of course. Suddenly I fell into one of them. It seemed to me like stepping off a cliff. I just went right down like a stone. Everything got dark.

I am so glad that my big brother saw me disappear beneath the water, and he rescued me. Because he did that for me, he became my "savior" from drowning.

So really I owe my life to my brother!

Now, what has Jesus done for you?

The Bible tells us that He is "the Savior of the world." It sounds nice to say that, but what does it mean?

We are all a part of the world, so what the Bible really says is that He has saved *us*. But what has He saved us from? (Just today I phoned my big brother and thanked him again for saving my life long ago.) What can you thank Jesus for?

No person in the world today has actually seen Jesus, but He is a real man, and He is also God. But for sure He is one of us and He belongs to us.

The reason why we can't see Him like we see any other person is that He is much greater than any other person. Billions of people would want to see Him (and they will see Him some day soon), but it wouldn't be fair for Him to show Himself only to you or me. So everybody looks forward to seeing Him *in person* when He comes the second time. But when we do see Him we will thank Him, because He has *already* saved us from death.

But that's not the ordinary kind of death that He has saved us from. It's not the death that has happened when there's a funeral.

Jesus tells us that a funeral isn't about the real thing. When a person dies now, he simply goes to sleep until God's resurrection day, when he will come up again, Jesus said that God "so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). The death that people die now is not what that word "perish" means. When people die now it's just like when at night you say, "Good night, see you in the morning."

There is another kind of death—that's what the Bible says is "the second death" (Revelation 2:11; 20:14). *And that is what it means to "perish."* At the end of the great "thousand years" that are yet to come, the wicked people will be judged, and they will "perish" in the lake of fire. No resurrection from that—ever. They will just be gone forever. That's what "hell" will be.

It's not because God will be extra angry with them; He does not hate them. He still pities them. But they themselves have made their choice to "perish." God won't force them to change their minds. They don't want to live forever in God's kingdom. They actually want to be separate from Him and separate from His kingdom. And so, God must give them what they really want. It sounds crazy, and it is, but Jesus says that "anyone who hates Me loves death" (Proverbs 8:36). Can you imagine that?

That is what Jesus has actually saved you and me from. Take a deep breath; that is proof that Jesus has saved you from that second death because if He had not saved us from it, we would all be dead right now in it. So don't ever think that Jesus has done nothing for you!

All this means that God intends that the life you and I have today shall be the beginning of everlasting life. And it will be so, if we "walk with Jesus." He is not "I-want-to-be-your-Savior." He *is* your Savior! Now don't push Him away.

Little people can catch hold of big ideas!

When we think of what Jesus has saved us *from*, we want to say the biggest "Thank You" we can think of, because He could never have saved us this way unless He had already died our second death for us. And that's just what He did when He died on His cross. The death He died was hell itself, *the real thing*.

Many people don't see this, and that's why they don't give themselves to Jesus to live for Him. But now you *do* see it, don't you?

I thank my brother for saving me from going to "sleep" when I was a child, in the first death. But now I thank Jesus because He saved me from the second death, and I tell Him that I am glad to obey Him and give Him my whole life.

Won't you choose to do the same?

How An African Man Saved Jesus

This may seem strange to you, but it is true: an African man *did* save Jesus. It was when the priests and Pharisees and the Romans were forcing Jesus to carry His heavy cross up the hill to Calvary. The Romans, when they crucified people, always forced them to carry their cross to the place where they would be nailed to it. It was very cruel—the last thing that a condemned man could do with his arms and legs (while he could still use them) was to carry that heavy weight. And this time they would not be kind to Jesus: they would treat Him as if He were a bad criminal.

Jesus had been up all the night before, had nothing to drink and nothing to eat. He had been ridiculed, condemned, laughed at. Cruel men had squashed a crown of sharp thorns on to His head (they hurt!). And they had beaten Him until the blood flowed from His back.

When they laid the heavy cross on His shoulders, He tried ever so bravely to carry it all by Himself. But He was weakened by what He had already been through.

Jesus fainted beneath that terribly heavy load. The crowd that had been laughing and ridiculing Him stopped. Everybody wondered—now what's going to happen? The Roman soldiers were too cruel to offer to help Him; they just stood around, looking for someone they could force to do it. If they had kept on trying to force Him to carry it, it could have killed Him right there.

Just then an African man who was from out of town walked by. What's all the excitement about, he wondered. He stopped to watch, and saw the face of Jesus. He knew in his heart that this was not the face of a bad man; He is a good man! He said something good about Jesus, and the Roman soldiers heard him. Ah ha, they thought! Here's somebody who is a friend of this terrible Man! We'll *make him* carry the cross all the rest of the way! So they laid the cross on the shoulders of Simon of Cyrene, a man from Africa.

Simon did not refuse; he didn't try to argue or squirm his way free. He gladly bowed himself under the weight of the cross of Jesus and carried it all the way up the hill. (By the way, not one of Jesus' eleven disciples in the crowd offered to do this!) Simon saved Jesus from being tortured further.

We all stop to honor the continent of Africa which gave us one of her sons to carry the cross of the Son of God when He needed someone to help Him! Simon will be happy through all eternity that he did this. And when we meet him in the resurrection day, we will all thank him too, won't we?

But how about today? Even now, Jesus cannot carry His cross all by Himself. Put yourself in Simon's place—would you have been willing to help?

The Man Who Made God Happy

Once upon a time there was another man who learned that same lesson from Jesus— being willing to say “Goodbye!” forever. And what made him do it was love, the same real kind. And he made God very happy.

This man’s name was Moses.

He had led the people of Israel out of their Egyptian slavery, on the way to their Promised Land. They stopped at Mount Sinai to hear God promise to be with them forever, and to give them their own land forever, and of course the eternal life to go with it.

But in a few days they had broken all their promises. They had made a golden calf to worship, and bowed down before it like pagans. Then they had a wild party and forgot all about God and His promises. Of course God was very sorry.

Then God gave Moses a test.

God was seeking to deepen Moses’ understanding of why Jesus gave Himself for us. God told him, “Don’t try to stop Me. I am angry with [these people], and I am going to destroy them. Then I will make you and your descendants into a great nation.”

But Moses did try to stop Him. “Moses then returned to the Lord and said, ‘These people have committed a terrible sin. ... Please forgive their sin; but if You won’t, then remove my name from the book in which you have written the names of Your people’” (Exodus 32:10, 31, 32). In other words, Lord, if You can’t forgive these people, blot my name out of Your Book of Life, and let me die the second death with these people! I love them. If they must die, then I must die with them.

That was love!

God had not really meant to destroy them. He was testing Moses to see if Moses had the same kind of love in his heart that God has in His heart. And Moses stood the test. He had found a new reason for being faithful to God—not to get a reward for himself, not so he could go to heaven, not so he could avoid hell, but because he understood God’s love, and that love was now in his heart.

In these last days God is preparing many people all around the world who are learning like Moses learned—to understand the love of Christ which moves them to follow Him. It’s a new reason for following Jesus—not fear of being lost, but well, a better reason: l-o-v-e.

And among those people, there are many children. They are as important as any grown-ups. You are one, aren’t you?

Have You Ever Wished It Would Rain?

If you have ever lived in Africa, you know what it's like to wish, oh so much, that it would rain! We have long months of dusty-dry hot weather. And when finally the sky darkens with black clouds and you hear thunder begin to roll, and big drops begin to fall on your tin roof, it's so wonderful. You feel almost like heaven has begun on earth!

In Bible lands the people would plant their seeds in time for the rainy season. Then when the "early rains" came, the little seeds would sprout and the young crop of grain would begin to grow nicely. But just before the grain began to form, the farmers needed another rainy spell for the grain to ripen as it should. They called that "the latter rain." If for some reason it didn't come, the people would starve. That's why the Bible says they would "pray for the latter rain."

The Holy Spirit wants to get God's people ready to be translated when Jesus comes. And that can't happen unless they do prepare! God uses rain to make it clear, to help us understand. The *great real* Latter Rain is God sending the Holy Spirit in a special way to give God's people what they need. Sometimes there is sin buried deep in our hearts that we don't know is there. And of course that must be put away. That final work of getting ready is called the "harvest."

Jesus loves His church because "she" will become His bride. He wants the wedding to take place so He can come the second time and be with His people forever. The grain ripening for the "harvest" is the same as "His bride preparing herself" for "the wedding of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7, 8).

For a long time people who love the Bible have been praying for that great Latter Rain to come. Just like we in Africa love to have the rain come after our long dry season, the church will love for that wonderful "rain" to come. It will be a message more than it will be miracles (you see, Satan can work miracles!). It will be a message that lifts Jesus up so all can see Him more clearly. It won't scare people into keeping all of God's commandments—that's something called "legalism;" it will win people's hearts. They will see what it cost Jesus to die for us and save us. It will be love, pure heavenly love that will change their hearts and cause them to *want* to keep all of God's commandments.

And children and youth will love that most precious "latter rain" when it comes. It will be new life in the church. It will come because of the Lord's much more abounding grace. It will be a Good News message that the world has been starving to understand. The Lord has for a long time wanted "us" to tell it more clearly.

Oh, those will be happy days! Those who had been listening to the Holy Spirit will be glad to hear the message. It will be like sunrise after a long night. The world will get to see the most precious light that will help many people be ready for the coming of Jesus. His coming will then be really soon!

Can We Understand What Jesus Is Doing Now?

Have you ever been lost in a big crowd of people? When we visited the World's Fair, there were huge crowds. I told my grandson Ian, "Keep close to us" as we were walking on the sidewalks. But after a time he forgot, and soon found himself away from us.

Ian was a brave boy. He didn't like to be seen crying about anything. But as he began watching the faces of all the grownups and kids and not seeing anyone who knew him, and as he began to realize that he was l-o-s-t in a strange place, his self-control broke down. He started yelling, "Grandpa! Grandpa!"

To be separated from family members is bad. But being alone *from God*, feeling that *He* has gone off and left you, that you are "forsaken" by Him, that's worse. That terrible aloneness is what Jesus felt on His cross when He cried out, "My God, why have *You* forsaken Me?"

But He never wants us to have to feel that terrible way!

After He was raised from the dead He was taken back into heaven. His disciples watched as He went up. They felt very much alone in their dark, unfriendly world.

Two angels dressed like people stayed behind and told them, "This Jesus, who is taken from you into heaven, will come back *in the same way* that you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). This made them feel better and makes us feel better, too. We call that promise "the blessed hope."

But we keep wondering, *What is Jesus doing now?* What can He be doing in heaven that would make Him happy to stay there while we down here need Him? Is He having a vacation somewhere? Or could He have forgotten about us here?

No, He cannot forget us for we are all one. We are His brothers and sisters. He is the Son of God but also the Son of man. But He has found something very important to do— being a High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. When the Bible says "priest," it means someone whose job is to bring lost people and God back together again.

"But He is far away!" someone says. No. He said, "I will be with you always" (Matthew 28:20). That means He is closer to us than He was to His disciples long ago. We can't see Him, but we believe in God whom we can't see. So why can't we believe Jesus is near us even if we can't see Him? We don't want to go back to paganism!

But what is He doing today?

The "heavenly sanctuary" is where Jesus works (yes, He *does* work!). It's His office. He works 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including Christmas and New Year's. He is busy hearing people's prayers, answering them, sending angels on trips here and there ("they are sent to help those who are to receive salvation," Heb. 1:14). You can't imagine how big and grand that "office" is!

But is this kind of work to go on and on forever? Will it never come to an end?

Yes, it will, when Christ finishes what He is doing. And when it is done, He will come the second time as He promised, for then His people will be ready. To make it easy to understand—what He is doing is preparing His people for His second coming, so they will be translated without seeing death.

BIG job! But He will get it done! And He will finish it for you and me if we don't stop Him.

Tell Us More ... What Does "Translation" Mean?

All this long time since Jesus went back to heaven, He has prepared people who believe in Him to die so they could come up in the first resurrection. Great work!

They will hear His voice and rise when He returns again. This wonderful work of preparing them to die was what Jesus did in the *first apartment* (or "office") of the "heavenly sanctuary."

But the prophet Daniel was shown that after 2300 years (Daniel 8:14, KJV), Jesus would leave that first apartment (or "office") and enter the *second* apartment in the heavenly sanctuary. Then He would start a grand *new* work—preparing a people to be translated without seeing death at His second coming. We are living in that time today, the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary or the great Day of Atonement.

Of all the people who have died since the time of Abel (the first man who ever died), how can God know who are to be counted "worthy" to come up in that first resurrection? This new work of Jesus in the Most Holy Apartment will answer that question. They will be accounted "worthy to rise from death" and be resurrected (Luke 20:35).

It's clear in 1 Thessalonians 4: "We who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have died. There will be the shout of command, the voice of the commander of the angels, the sound of God's trumpet, and the Lord Himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first; then *we who are living at that time* [here's where we come in to the picture!] will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord" (verses 15-17).

Many people today are saying "Yes!" to the great High Priest, "Please do this special work for us!" They are letting Him take all sin from their hearts, including what they had not known was buried deep down there. When the Holy Spirit tells them about it, they choose to say "Yes!" to Him, and to say "No!" to the sin, no matter what it costs.

This is what "the cleansing of the sanctuary" is about. The record of our sins is there; so when we overcome the sin *here*, the record *there* gets cleansed. It's faster than e-mail. It's very simple.

While Jesus is doing His final work, He sends the Holy Spirit to each one who believes, and shows each of us the sins that we have not known were there. When we say, "Thank You! I'll let that sin go, too," the time will come when He will show God's people the last sin that is hidden and when they gladly say "Yes!" to the Holy Spirit, then the seal of God can be placed on their foreheads.

Have you ever made a mistake and put something in the microwave oven that was metal, that doesn't belong there, and then you saw the sparks fly? If we cherish sin in our hearts, then when Jesus comes something like that must happen. That must not be!

We say, "Thank You, Lord, for saving us. Now please hold us by the hand and keep us faithful. And please teach us how we can help others get ready, too. Amen."

The Latter Rain Story Will Become Very Good News

This marvelous blessing from heaven has already begun. If you were living in your tin shack in Africa and the dry season has been long and hot, just to hear a few drops fall on the roof is great good news, even though the refreshing showers you want and you need haven't come yet. But yes, there has been a beginning of the great, real "latter rain." Many people haven't known about it yet. But the full rain *will* come and it will prepare God's people to "lighten the earth with glory" just before Jesus can come again.

What had begun as "the former rain" on the great Day of Pentecost long ago when thousands heard the message of Jesus preached so clearly, will now be finished with this "latter rain" of the same Holy Spirit, only in a greater way.

People all over the world are beginning to look at the message itself that is such "most precious good news." We can be sure that the Holy Spirit sent from God is working worldwide to help people to begin to understand.

Jesus has not forsaken His precious church, nor is He trying to raise up another church. What He is doing is giving *this* church the precious gift of repentance. It's the greatest repentance of all the ages! The Holy Spirit is working. The Lord loves this church, just like a bridegroom loves his bride who wants the wedding day to come soon.

A wedding is an exciting time, isn't it? Now, the greatest wedding ever is just upon us. It's what the Book of Revelation says is "the marriage of the Lamb." You have never seen a wedding like that will be! And it says the announcement will be made in heaven that "the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself for it" (19:7, 8). We can't forget that Jesus is still a man, even though He is also still the Son of God. And He loves *His* bride-to-be more than any man on earth has ever loved his wife. And for His wedding to be postponed so long as it has been postponed makes Jesus to be very disappointed.

And all this long time while Jesus is still disappointed, He has to endure the pain of watching and feeling the suffering of people all over the world. If we could say something to that wonderful Bride, we would say, "Please, come; don't delay any longer! Tell your Bridegroom 'I do!' in the great wedding."

We don't want to miss that party, do we?

Will It Be Fun to Meet Jesus Face to Face!

Have you ever thought about that?

There is no reason under heaven why you should be the least bit scared to meet Him and to look in His eyes. He has never wanted you to be afraid of Him!

He is your Friend—*already is*. You don't have to *do* anything to win Him over to *become* your Friend. That idea is part of the darkness that good preachers used to preach before that wonderful "latter rain" began to come with better Good News for us. When He gave Himself for you on His cross, He did that to prove to you that He is *already* your Best Friend forever.

There's already a silent, underground bond that has tied you to Him ever since you first began to respond to His love for you. That means when you finally do see Him and you can meet Him, you will look into His eyes and He will look into your eyes, and the two of you will instantly recognize each other (of course He will have known you all along). There will be a glint shining in His eyes as He looks into your eyes that will tell you that He knows all about you (and still loves you) and you will feel like you have known Him all your life.

You will instantly feel like He is the other half of that "broken stone" that is you. You will tell everybody, "I have never really known until this moment what pure happiness is!" Translation will be a thrill. He will put His arm around you and sweep you up with Him into heaven. And you will at last feel perfectly at home with Him because from this day on you will live with him here.