



## Ash Wednesday Day 1

Can you remember back to the last time you got a cut? Or needed a band-aid? Or what about the last time you got a splinter, a rug burn or even got sick? Every time one of those things happens, it's a reminder that we live in bodies that aren't perfect and sometimes get hurt. That our bodies don't always do what we want them to do. They're reminders that we are humans and we get hurt more easily than we think we will.

Ash Wednesday is the day that begins the 40-day countdown to Easter. Some people celebrate Ash Wednesday by going to church and getting a smudge of ashes put on their forehead. That may sound strange. But people get the ashes on the forehead to remind them, like a band-aid reminds us or a splinter or a cut, that we are all fragile—made from ashes, or dust, like God made Adam in the Garden of Eden—and we will go back to dust one day when we die.

That's kind of sad to think about. But it's actually good to remember, especially because we know what is coming 40 days from now—Easter! **If we are going to celebrate Jesus coming back to life, we need to remember first how much we need him. How fragile we are so we can know how powerful and big he is.**

The next 40 days we are going to get ready for Easter by learning more about Jesus' life. So that when Easter comes we can REALLY celebrate how great Jesus was in all He did and said, and have a better idea about how He wants us to live

**John the Baptist** Day 2 John 1:29

Chocolate with almost anything is delicious. Chocolate with pretzels, with almonds, with cookies. In some places, people even eat crickets and grasshoppers dipped in chocolate! Gross, right?!? Even crazier, Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist ate insects—*but not the chocolate covered kind*. Just the plain old locust kind.

John was kind of different. He lived in the wilderness, he wore the furs and skins from wild animals, I imagine his hair was kind of crazy looking and out of control, and his only job was to tell people to get ready, because *Jesus was coming!*

And then, one day, what John said would happen, *did*. Jesus actually showed up! John had been out in the desert baptizing people in the Jordan River, telling people to “Repent!” to change the way they were living, and all of the sudden, over the top of the hill, Jesus appears. And John points to Jesus and says,

**“Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

I love that John says this first. **When you see something amazing, don't you want people to look at it?** When you see a rainbow, a shooting star, a tree with beautiful leaves, sunrays coming through the clouds, what do you say?

“Look!”

**One of the best things you can do, as you grow up and learn and more and more about God, is make a habit of looking for the ways you see God working around you.**

Look for the good things He has done!

Look of the wonder around you!

Look for beautiful things, amazing things, things that remind you how big He his.

And when you see them? Tell others to look, too!

**Temptations of Jesus** Day 3 Matthew 4:1-2

After John baptized Jesus, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. While he was there, we're told Jesus was tempted. For 40 days Jesus didn't eat anything. He was completely alone. And since He didn't have a blow-up mattress or comfy pillow, surrounded by stuffed animals, I bet He was tired too.

Remember the last time you were SUPER hungry? Maybe even hangry? What about the last time you went to bed too late and had to get up too early and you were *not* happy about it? Or a time when you were by yourself for a long time with no one to play with and you started to feel kind of lonely, or just kind of *bleh*?

If you've ever felt that way, Jesus understands. He has too.

Sometimes it's easy to forget that Jesus wasn't just God, He was human too! He got annoyed when He had the hiccups, His stomach made funny noises when He was digesting food, His eyes watered if He was around onions or jalapeno peppers, and He had ear wax. Gross.

Also, He got hungry, tired and lonely. And that was when He was tempted the most. When we feel hungry and tired and lonely, we are going to be tempted to sometimes make bad choices, to not be as wise in our decisions.

So sometimes you need to ask yourself:

Do I need to rest?

Do I need a snack?

Do I need to talk mom or dad or a friend?

**Sometimes something as simple as making sure you have good food in your body, good rest for your body and good people around you, will help you not give into temptation and make better choices.**

Oh, yeah. One more thing. Jesus didn't give in to any of the temptations—even when super hungry, tired and lonely. That's what makes him God. BUT, I bet when He was done? He took a long nap after eating a huge pizza with his friends.

I don't know for sure. But that's what I think.

**Salt and Light** Day 4 Matthew 5:14

Do you know some of the names of the disciples? There were 12 of them. After Jesus was crucified and came back to life, and then went back up to heaven the disciples realized they had a BIG job ahead of them. They needed to tell people all about Jesus and who He was and what He had done and why that news would change everything.

These guys were so brave. They went everywhere telling people about Jesus, even when it was dangerous to do it, but they wanted to make sure the stories of what they had heard from Jesus and seen Him do were heard by as many people as possible. So they travelled and they sent letters and they wrote down lots of the stories they remembered.

**When the disciple John wrote down what he remembered about Jesus, he described Jesus as life that brought light to the world.**

Have you ever been in a dark room and turned on an overhead light? Or a flashlight? Or a book light? It's amazing how just that little bit of light can change the feel of a whole room. Suddenly the shadows don't look as scary. The objects in the corners don't look like monsters. And nothing feels as frightening any more.

In one of the messages Jesus taught, He called us, as followers of Jesus, the light of the world. John says Jesus is the light, and Jesus says we are light. That means with Jesus living inside of us, we can light up the whole world around us. And just like a book light, or a flashlight, a little bit of light makes a BIG difference.

**So how do you shine the light of Jesus you have inside of you?**

**You make the kind of choices Jesus would make.**

**You are kind to everyone. You serve your family (even if they are driving you crazy.) You are generous with your stuff. You are patient. You are kind. You keep your anger and frustration from taking control of you. You forgive quickly.**

Anytime you do any of these things, you are being a light. Just like Jesus told us. And when you are a light you make the world around *better*. And that's a big deal.

**Great Feast** Day 5 Luke 14:22

Jesus was so good at telling stories to help explain what He was like and what God was like. One time he told the story about a great feast. In the story, there was a man who made a huge meal of the most delicious food. It had all of your favorite things to eat. Think pizza and burritos! Chicken nuggets and French fries! Oreos! Ice cream bars! Donuts and bacon!! (Is your mouth starting to water yet?)

So this man prepared all of this food and sent out a TON of invitations to people living in the town. What did the invitation say? “The food is ready! Come on over!”

What would you say if you heard there was a house in your neighborhood that had all of your favorite food and you had gotten an invitation asking you to come over?

Of course you would go! I would go too!

But the strangest thing happened. Everyone had a reason not to go! “I’m busy,” they said. “I have something else going on.” “I have to work.” Person after person had some excuse for why they couldn’t go to the party and eat all of the delicious food the man had made.

So the servant who had delivered all of the invitations went back to the man who had prepared the feast and told him, “No one can come.”

The man was frustrated. He wanted so badly to do something for the people he cared about, to show them how much he appreciated them by cooking for them all of their favorite things and making a place where people could come and be together and *nobody came*.

So the man told his servant to go back out and ask the people he may have skipped before to come. People who maybe weren’t wearing the best clothes, who didn’t have the bigger houses or the nicer cars. The servant came back and the man said, “There is still room for more!” This time the servant went even *farther* to find people to come.

***“Urge everyone to come!” the man said, “So the house will be full!”***

**So why did Jesus tell this story? Because He wants us to know, there is always room for more people at the party Jesus will throw in heaven.** That Jesus wants a table full of food, and a table full of friends and He wants us there—but more than that. He wants EVERYONE there, even the people we might not expect to be invited. **Jesus wants us to scoot our chairs in closer and make space. To pull up all the chairs we have and squeeze in close.**

He’s invited everyone to the feast! So we need to treat everyone like they’ve been invited and love them like Jesus has!

**Little Children** Day 6 Matthew 19:13-14; Luke 18

Have you ever had a grown up tell you, “Wait one second!” “I need to finish this phone call!” “I’m cooking!” “I’m working! I’m busy!” There’s a story from the Bible where we read about a group of parents who are trying to get their kids closer to Jesus, and the disciples were keeping them away. I imagine they were saying the same sorts of things you’ve heard a grown-up say “Wait one minute! Jesus is busy! He’s doing something important!” I don’t think they meant it to sound rude, but it probably did. If I had to guess, I bet the disciples were just trying to tell the kids that Jesus was in the middle of something, and if they could just be patient while He got his super important other stuff done, that would be great.

But do you know what happened? Jesus did not say, “Yeah kids, stop interrupting!” Nope. He looked at the kids with a big grin and laughing eyes, and said, “Get over here!” and I bet he scooped the boys and girls up in his arms, tickling them under their arms and behind their knees and in their sides—just the spots where all little kids are ticklish, because I bet Jesus knew that kind of thing, how to make kids laugh, at just the right place (but not enough to make them wet their pants!!)

Now, it *is* true. You shouldn’t interrupt adults if they are in the middle of something—on the phone, in a conversation with another adult, trying to follow directions in a place they aren’t familiar with.

But do you know what else is true? **You are never interrupting Jesus. He will never tell you, “Come back later! Wait one minute!” When you need Him, He turns his full attention directly to you and wants to hear everything you have to say. Right that very second. No matter what it’s about.**

Where and when can you talk to Jesus? When do you usually talk to him?

**Golden Rule** Day 7 Matthew 7:12

Have you ever heard of the expression, “the golden rule”? Even if you have never heard that phrase before, I bet you know what the golden rule is. You probably first started hearing it before you even went to school. It’s one of the first things parents and teachers try to teach their kids:

**Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.**

Or the way you have heard it said before: Treat others the way you want to be treated.

It sounds so simple, right? But it can be hard to do. *Really* hard.

We usually want to treat people the way they deserve to be treated. Like, your brother pushes you, he deserves to be pushed back. A grown-up raises their voice at you, and they deserve to be yelled at back. Someone at school says something mean, they *deserve* for you to say something mean back.

**See, it’s a lot easier to treat others the way they deserve to be treated. But that’s not what Jesus asks us to do. He asks us to treat others how WE WANT to be treated.** And how do you want to be treated when you do something you shouldn’t have done?

If you push first, do you want to be pushed back?

If you yelled first, do you want to be yelled at back?

If you said something mean first, do you want to have something mean said back?

Of course not. When it comes to our own mistakes, we want grace. We want a second chance. **We want people to be kinder to us than we deserve. And the same thing we want for ourselves is what Jesus asks us to give to other people.**

You’ll probably work on getting this right your whole life. But I promise you, if you start doing it now, it will get easier and easier to do, *and* it will make you really happy. You will have more friends and better friends because of it and people will know you as kid who is kind no matter what. And that is a good way to be.

**Jesus feeds the 5,000** Day 8 John 6:1-13

Have you ever watched a movie or been reading a book and been so into it that when you're done you realize it's way past lunch time or dinner time and you didn't even know it? Jesus was such a good teacher, that He would teach, and people would sit and listen to Him for HOURS without knowing how much time had passed. One day, Jesus is preaching on the side of a hill, with the Sea of Galilee behind him, and it starts to get late. People love what they hear Jesus saying, and before they know it, it's time to eat! But a lot of people there didn't have food with them. Maybe they forgot to bring it. Maybe they didn't have a lot of money and didn't have any food to bring. Either way, it's time to eat and there's not enough food to go around.

But there's this little boy. And he has two fish and five loaves of bread and do you know what he does? He gives his meal to the disciples. I wonder if his mom would have been mad for not eating everything she had packed for him. I wonder if he didn't like fish and was happy to get rid of it. Or if he was super hungry but felt like it was the right thing to do. Whatever the reason, he gives it away, and Jesus takes it and prays, thanking God for the meal. And then the disciples begin to pass the food around.

Oh, I forgot to tell you. There were *5,000 people* there. Was this boy crazy? That was too many people, and his lunch was too small.

But you will never believe what happens! The baskets of food are passed around, down one row and up the next, and the next, and the next, further back, way up the hill to the people at the very top and *every single person* gets food! Not only that, there are leftovers!! I wish we knew what the little boy thought after that. I bet he couldn't believe that his little lunch made as big a difference as it did!

I want you to be like that little boy. I want you to take what you have, even if it's a little, even if it doesn't feel like much, even if it doesn't seem like it could ever make a difference, and I want you *to give anyway*.

**Bring what you have. Give what you can, because when you do, you practice your generosity muscle.** Even with the small stuff. Especially with the small stuff.

I bet when that little boy grew up, he was generous with not just his bread and his fish, but his home and his time and his money. Because he started when he was young (like you!) and he saw that what you have doesn't matter as much as what you do with what you have. So, he gave. And Jesus did the rest. **Don't ever not be generous because it feels too small or too little.**

What's the best part about being generous?

**Tree and fruit** Day 9 Luke 6:43-45

Did you know that bananas grow on trees? And oranges? And grapefruit? And avocados? But do you know what you will never see? A tree that has one branch with bananas, another branch with avocados and another with oranges. A tree only makes one kind of fruit, and when you see the fruit, you know something about the tree. The fruit is a clue about the whole tree.

One day, Jesus taught the people listening about fruit. But not fruit like, what to put in your smoothies (although, if I had to guess, I bet he liked blueberries, strawberries and maybe bananas—and just a bit of coconut oil. What do you think?)

No, Jesus was talking about fruit and what that has to do with us—people who love Him. He said you can tell a lot about a tree when you look at its fruit. And we should be trees that produce the kind of fruit that give clues to the people around us about what Jesus is like.

**That means every time you act with kindness and compassion, with courage and with selflessness, you're making fruit.** But not just any fruit.

**It's fruit that tells others about who you are and who you belong to.**

Fruit that shows others God is doing something inside of you, that He's planting seeds, and watering them, and watching the roots go deep inside of you. And best of all, when you behave in a way that honors Him and in a way that looks like God, it's like God inside of you, sneaking out for the world to see. And that is the best kind of fruit you can imagine!

**John the Baptist: are you the one we are waiting for?** Day 10 Matthew 11:1-6

Remember John the Baptist? He was Jesus's cousin—the one who told everyone, “Get ready!!! Jesus is here!” After Jesus started going around Israel and teaching people about what God was like, John was put in prison by King Herod. While he was in there, I bet he started to wonder if Jesus was really God's son, and if He was, why Jesus hadn't gotten him, Jesus' own cousin, out of jail yet. In fact, John actually sent a message to Jesus asking Him—are you the one I thought you were? Are you God's son?” I'd probably wonder the same thing—if Jesus was really as powerful as I thought He was.

Sometimes we are going to ask God to do something, and he won't do it. The answer is a “no”. Whether it's “no” when you pray for snow on Christmas or “no” to the toy you wanted for your birthday. Other times it's “no” to something bigger. When you pray for a hurricane to go away and it doesn't. Or for fighting to stop and it hasn't. Or for a friendship to get better and it won't.

“No” from God is hard. And it can feel like a “no” means God doesn't love you (just like you sometimes think a “no” from mom and dad can mean that.) But do you know what is great about this story? When John is feeling like he hears a “no” from Jesus, Jesus tells John about all of the “yes's” He'd done for other people. The blind people could see again! The sick people were healthy! The deaf people could hear again!

Jesus wants to make sure John knows what God *can do* and *is doing* around him.

And then Jesus says this back to John, still in jail, **“The people who still follow me and trust me even when they don't understand what I do, are blessed. They're happy.”**

**Sometimes we get a “no” and sometimes we don't understand why. And when that happens, we need to remember what we *know* is true about Jesus and can trust no matter what:**

**That Jesus is good and loving *all the time*.**

We don't have to get everything we want to know God loves us. Jesus says we can be happy if we don't understand, if we are told “no” and still love God!

Have you ever been told “no” by mom or dad and it felt like we didn't love you?  
When has “no” actually been a good thing?

What can you do to try to remember what we know is true about God, even if we don't get what we want?

### Parable of the Good Samaritan Day 11 Luke 10:25

One day, while Jesus was teaching about the most important rule for living, to love your neighbor as yourself, a man asked him, who is your neighbor? To answer, Jesus tells a story.

He says there was a Jewish man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and while on his way he was attacked by a group of robbers. These guys took all of his money and the clothes he had and hurt him. Then they left him there.

While the man was injured on the road, a priest came by. (The people hearing the story thought for sure this priest would help the man.) But Jesus said the priest crossed to the other side of the road to avoid the man who was dirty and bleeding and then kept going. Another man who worked at the Temple came by, and he also crossed to the other side of the road.

And then a Samaritan comes along.

Now, when Jesus was alive the Jewish people did not like the Samaritans. And the Samaritans didn't like Jewish people either. But a Samaritan sees this Jewish man and the craziest thing happens. He feels compassion for the Jewish man who has been beat up. And he helps him! He took care of his cuts with bandages and oils and gave him something to drink. Not only that, he picked up the man, put him on his donkey and took him to an inn so he could get healthy. The Samaritan left money there for the innkeeper to take care of him and said he would come back and pay more if he needed too.

By telling this story, Jesus was saying, **everyone is your neighbor. Even the people you don't like. Even the people who don't like you. And what does loving our neighbor and loving others look like? Jesus tells us. And in the story, the Samaritan shows us. It means doing one more thing than we think we should.** The Samaritan did more than was asked. He did more than he had to. Because **that's what love does. It does what you should do. And then it does what you don't have to do.** And do you know how Jesus ends the story? He says, "Now go and do the same."

What is one way you can love someone today? What is one thing more you can do for them? And who can you do it for?

**Jesus walks on water** Day 12 (Matthew 14:22-27)

One day, the disciples were on a boat, headed across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had gone off to pray alone and He was going to catch up with them later, when a storm came out of nowhere! It was a *bad* storm. With all of the stuff that makes a storm scary—except even worse, because they were on a boat in the middle of the water! There was lots of wind, and big waves and lightening and thunder and rain falling so hard you couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

And then the craziest thing happens. The disciples look out on the water and they see someone walking towards them. I bet they thought they had lost their minds! But they rubbed the rain out of their eyes, blinked again and again, and realized, nope. They weren't crazy. There was DEFINITELY someone walking towards them. Which would be even more scary than the storm—except that it was Jesus! And do you know what Jesus does? Well, I can tell you what He *doesn't* do. He doesn't make the storm stop. Not right away.

Instead he says, **“Don't be afraid, I'm here!”**

When we are in the middle of something scary, the first thing we want is for the scariness to go away. Whether that's a big storm, or a loud noise at night, or a part in a movie or book we aren't expecting, or a dog barking, or a siren wailing, or something scary we hear about on the news. We want it to go away.

**But when Jesus shows up where the disciples are, He doesn't calm the storm. Not yet. First he tells them to have courage! To be cheerful! To feel comforted! Not because the storm has stopped. But because of what he said next: “I'm here!”**

Sometimes Jesus takes the scary thing away. That's great! Sometimes he doesn't. That can be really hard. But either way, Jesus is always here with us! We can have courage and be cheerful and feel safe. God is with us. And that never changes, no matter what!

**So, no matter what the scary thing is, remember that whether God makes it go away or not, there is something that is true all the time. God is with you. God is close by. You are never alone.**

**The Good Shepherd** Day 13 John 10

They say when a newborn baby hears his mama's voice, he recognizes it. Immediately. They think the reason is because the baby has spent nine whole months in his mama's tummy, and every time she talked, the baby would hear her voice and over time it started to become familiar. The baby has all of that practice before he comes into the world to get to know exactly what his mom sounds like.

So when the baby is first born and hears his mama's voice for the first time from outside of her tummy? The baby will calm down more quickly for her than he will for any other person. Because he knows his mama's voice and hearing it makes the baby feel safe when coming into a whole new world.

The disciple John talks about a time when Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd. If Jesus was the Good Shepherd, that makes us the sheep! And Jesus said when the sheep hear His voice, they respond to it. Meaning, when we hear His voice, we respond to it. That's because the longer the sheep stay with their shepherd the more familiar He becomes to them.

**So when Jesus says we are like His sheep and He is like our shepherd, He's saying the more time we spend with Him, the more we will begin to recognize His voice in our hearts.** Which sounds great!

But how will we recognize it?

By listening to that little part inside of us that whispers to do the right thing, the wise thing, the kind thing, the brave thing.

The best thing you can do as you grow up is, practice listening to the Good Shepherd—Jesus's—voice. Because the more you listen to it, the easier it will become to do what the voice says. **When you practice listening and then practicing doing, you will begin to make a habit of hearing Jesus and obeying Jesus, even when it gets hard!**

## Jesus's Reputation Day 14 Matthew 11:19

When Jesus started to become more famous in the area He taught and did miracles, He started to earn a reputation. Do you know what a reputation is? It's what people think about you. It's when people hear the things you say or see the things you do, or hear *about* what you say and do, and come up with an idea of what you are like. If you are someone who doesn't share very well, you get a reputation for being selfish. But if you are someone who likes to give things to others you get a reputation for being generous.

Jesus was getting a reputation because of the people He hung out with. All the really important religious leaders had very strict rules about who they thought should get the attention of such important people—like them. But Jesus didn't follow their rules. Actually, He hung out with people who didn't keep most of the rules the Temple had. He hung out with people who ate a lot of food and liked to have parties, and were loud and stayed up late and who other people wished would just BE QUIET. He hung out with the sick people who grossed everyone out with the germs they had, and the people who worked for Rome who sometimes took too much money from the people of Israel who already didn't have a lot of money, and this made all the religious people really mad.

So, Jesus' reputation was that he hung out with the wrong kind of people. But Jesus didn't care what people said about Him. It didn't bother Him that other people didn't like who His friends were.

Did you know you have a reputation too? **Everything you do is sending a message about who you are. So that when people say your name, they have a picture come to mind about what kind of a person you are.**

What do you want people to say about you when you aren't around? I would guess you would want people to say you're nice, and friendly and kind and funny and smart and a lot of other stuff! You can't get everyone to like you, all of the time. That's okay. Not everyone liked Jesus. But you need to decide whose opinions matter the most. Are you trying to get the right kind of people to like you? And the people who may not like you, why don't they? If someone doesn't like you because you wouldn't let them be mean to someone, because you told the truth when someone else was lying, because you offered to help when everyone else wanted to go to the playground, that's okay. But you also need to make decisions that make you like *yourself*. Are you making choices that make you like who you are becoming?

**You get to decide what kind of reputation you want to have, and then make decisions every day to become that person.**

What kind of reputation do you want to have?

### Parable of the Vineyard Workers Day 15 Matthew 20

One day Jesus told a story about a man who was in charge of a big vineyard—land where grapes are planted and grown. In the story, winter is coming and the vineyard owner needs help to save his grapes. So, in the morning, he goes to the marketplace, finds a few men and asks if they would help them, telling them he would pay them the right amount of money for a day's work.

A couple of hours later the owner realizes he is going to need more help. So at 12 o'clock, and then again at 3 o'clock he goes back to the marketplace, finds some more guys not working and asks them for their help, telling them he would pay them a fair amount of money too.

At the end of the day all of the grapes have been picked. The workers have saved the crop! And now it's time to pay them for their work. The owner asks them to line up—the people who were hired last, first in line. The workers hired first, last in line.

When he goes to pay the workers who had only been there for three hours, you won't believe what happens. The owner gives them enough money for a *full day of work!* Everyone was so surprised! Wouldn't you be? Seeing that, the guys who had been there all day thought to themselves, "Wow! If he paid them that much for just working three hours, I wonder what he'll pay us!" Then, it was their turn. And when the owner got to them, guess what?

The workers who had been there all day got paid *the same* as the workers who had only been there three hours. How do you think the workers who had been there all day, felt? They were ANGRY. "We worked longer," they cried, "and harder!"

The vineyard owner looked at the angry workers. "Why are you mad?" he wondered. "I told you I was going to pay you for a day's work, and that's what I did. Why does it bother you that I am generous to someone else?"

Why do you think they were mad? *Because it wasn't fair.* (Actually, if I had been one of the workers who had been there all day, I would have been mad too.)

Jesus told this story because *grace* isn't fair, and that's what these workers got. Grace. **Grace is when you get something you don't deserve.** And when you're someone who obeys really well and who does the right thing often, you start to think you *deserve* more love or more attention from God, than people who don't do those things. You think you deserve grace and others don't. But that misses the whole point of grace! Jesus told the story to say, "Guess what? *My love is the same for everyone.* And for people who are good, this can make you mad. But the truth is, **nothing you do, or don't do, changes how I feel about you. No badness makes me love you less. And no goodness makes me love you more.**"

And even though it may not feel like it all the time, this kind of grace is actually really great news. And the *best* news about Jesus.

When have you been shown grace? How did it make you feel? How can you show grace to someone else?

**Do Not Judge** Day 16 Matthew 7:1-2

Have you ever noticed something somebody did wrong? Maybe they brought something to school they weren't allowed to. Maybe they said a word you aren't allowed to say. Maybe they were whining, or being too rough. When we see someone do something we think is wrong it can be really easy to think, "I would NEVER do that. That person made a really bad choice." And then we think we are better than that person because we wouldn't do what they did.

**Isn't it crazy how EASY it is to notice someone else doing something wrong? But it's a lot harder to catch ourselves doing something wrong.** It's easy to hear whining in someone else's voice, but so much harder to hear it in our own. It's easy to point out when someone else breaks a rule, but it's harder to see when we break a rule.

The good news is, Jesus knew this would be hard for us. That something in us would always be wanting to point out what everyone else isn't getting right, while ignoring what we aren't getting right. He knew we would do it because something about seeing how someone else is wrong makes us feel better ourselves. It makes us feel a little puffed up and a little proud.

When we do this, it's called *judging*. **Judging means we pay way more attention to someone else's mistakes than we do our own.**

And Jesus taught us to not judge, saying when we do, it's like pointing out a speck of dust in someone else's eye when you have a whole piece of wood in your own eye! Or think of it this way. When we care about someone else's mistake more than we care about our own, it's like pointing out a drop of ice cream from dessert left on their cheek, or a smudge of pizza sauce left on their chin, when we have a whole bowl of ice cream dumped on our heads, or we rubbed our faces on top of a huge pizza. Sure, they may have a tiny crumb or smudge of food on them, but look at us! We are a complete mess!

Jesus is saying it's easy to see where others have gotten it wrong, and to miss where we get it wrong. But there is usually a lot more we need to work on ourselves first before we can start looking at how wrong others are. **We need to clean up our own mess.** We need to get the ice cream out of our hair and the pizza sauce out of our noses. We need to a shower, before we worry about them getting a napkin!

**When you are tempted to think of how other people make mistakes. Stop. And think of one thing YOU could get better at doing in your own life.** Save your energy for fixing your own mistakes instead of focusing on the mistakes of others.

**Parables of the Lost Things** Day 17 Luke 15

In the book of Luke Jesus tells three stories in a row all about lost things. He tells the story of a woman who loses a coin in her house. He tells the story of a shepherd who loses one of his sheep. And He tells the story of a father who loses his son. It seems strange to have three stories all about the same thing in a row. Why do you think He did that?

I think Jesus did it to make sure the people listening knew something about Him. **Jesus wanted them to know how much He cares about lost things.**

Have you ever lost something before? Of course you have! (I have too.) You've lost Legos, stuffed animals, even your own money! You know exactly what it feels like to want to find the one thing you can't! It makes you feel crazy! You go through every corner of your room, every room in the house, in the car, in the patio, in the garage, to try to find that ONE THING you can't stop thinking about.

But Jesus ends these three stories of lost things with the story of a son who had left home and who had made some poor choices. And the dad missed him so much, Jesus says he would stand on the front porch looking down the road, waiting for his son to come home again.

We know what it feels like to lose a *thing*, but Jesus wants us to see if we can imagine what it feels like to lose a *person*. To want to be with someone you love and care about, but who isn't there. Jesus tells us this story because this is exactly how God feels about us.

No mistake we make, no unwise choice we act on, no words we say, lie we tell, bad thing we do, will keep God from welcoming us back, from loving us, exactly as we are. If we ever feel lost because of what we've done wrong, Jesus will find us. Just picture him standing on the front porch squinting his eyes to see in the distance, to see how close you are to coming back.

**Because here's the truth. God cares about lost things. Especially us.**

**Parable of Lost Son** Day 18 Luke 15:11-32

Remember how we started talking yesterday about the stories Jesus tells of lost things? The last story is about a lost son, but there is another son in the story—the older brother—who isn't lost, but stays at home while his younger brother leaves. When his younger brother comes back, and the dad is so happy to see him he wants to have a party to celebrate, do you know how the older brother felt? Not excited or grateful. He felt jealous. Have you ever felt jealous before? It's a terrible feeling. The older brother was jealous because he didn't think he had done anything wrong, and his younger brother had, but his dad didn't seem to care! He was still celebrating his younger brother, and this made his older brother mad.

At the end of the story the party the dad wanted to have, began—but the older brother refused to go in. He stood outside the door, listening to the laughing and the music, smelling the good food, watching all of the people, and he crossed his arms, stomped his feet and stayed right where he was. His dad came out and begged him to come in—he was missing all of the fun! But we never find out if he goes inside.

Have you ever had your feelings hurt and gotten upset about something, and everyone around you is having such a good time and it just makes you so *mad*? You want to be miserable. You want other people to be as miserable as you are. Maybe you even think, I'm going to stay mad until they notice me and then I'm going to tell them how upset I am!" I think that was how the older brother felt.

But you know what? The party didn't stop, even when the older brother didn't join it. The father asked him to come in, but his one son couldn't stop whining or pouting to do it. **Sometimes we choose to stay miserable longer than we have to, when we just need to get over ourselves. We need to join the party!** We need to shake off what bothered us, what made us mad, and decide: Everyone else is having a great time. I'm the only one not having a great time. And it's up to me to start having a great time.

Don't miss out on the party!

### Ten Lepers Day 19 (Luke 17:10)

One of the things that made people want to see Jesus was that He was always healing people who were sick. And not just sick with a stuffy nose or upset stomach, people who had been sick their whole lives and never knew what it was like to be well. One day He healed 10 guys who had something called “leprosy”. This was a disease that affected your skin and when people had leprosy others thought you were dirty because of how it made you look. And if you looked dirty all the time, that would make it hard to have friends and it also kept you from going to the Temple to worship God. So, to have leprosy meant you were pretty lonely, and to be healed of it was a really big deal! Imagine how different their lives would be now that they were well!

The ten sick—now healthy—guys must have been SO excited because you will never guess what happened. They ran off to go to tell their families and their friends the good news, but the problem is, they never even said “Thank you” to Jesus before they left.

Except for one. He came back to show how grateful he was.

That one guy, he was remembered for this, for being the one who came back, for being the one who said thanks. Why? **Because what you do, becomes who you are. When you show gratitude, you become a grateful person. You do something enough and you become that thing.**

So think about it. What kind of kid do you want to be? What kind of grown up do you want to become?

Kind?

Generous?

Compassionate?

Persistent?

Obedient?

Gentle?

Selfless?

And then start RIGHT NOW making the decisions who will make you into that, just like the grateful leper.

**How Two Things Can Be True** Day 20 John 3:16; Luke 19:10

When I was little I had the hardest time on Christmas, my birthday and family vacation. I would look forward to these days SO MUCH and then they would happen, and they were AMAZING but there was always just a little bit of sad mixed in with the happy. Because the day was great, but it was almost over. The vacation was the best, but it was almost time to go home.

It seems strange, but you can be HAPPY and SAD at the same time. It's called a paradox. That's a big word that means, two things that seem like opposites can both be true.

You can be nervous and excited.  
It can rain and the sun can be out.  
You can cry when nothing is wrong.  
You can be mad at someone and still love them.

This can be hard to understand and hard to feel, because it's sort of confusing. How can you be two things that don't seem to fit together at all?

As confusing as it sounds, it's true. Not only that, Jesus talked a lot of this idea of paradox. He talked about two things being true that didn't seem like they could be. But He did because He knew if we only thought one thing was true, we would be missing out.

So what is one paradox He taught?

**YOU ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD! That means God put a little bit of Himself in you. That means you are valuable and important and worth so incredibly much!** And Jesus wants you to know this *first*. That just like he called his creation good, YOU ARE GOOD too!

But do you know what else is true?

**We have sin inside of us. We sometimes make terrible decisions. We hurt people—sometimes on purpose. We do the wrong thing, even though we know it is wrong. On our own we are often selfish and impatient and get frustrated easily and look out for ourselves first. Basically, we aren't always good.**

Both of these things are true. And both of these things matter. Believing one doesn't make the other not true. **You matter to God. He is proud of you. He is crazy about you. He lives inside of you. But sin is in there too. And sometimes you do wrong things. And a lot of the time, the thing we want to do first and the thing we want to do most, is the thing that isn't the best.**

The sooner you can understand this—that you are good, and also not good, that you are so valuable, but sometimes treat others as invaluable—the better you will feel. I promise.

Don't believe one thing and forget the other. Both are true. Both are important. Both are a part of you. Work hard at remembering both, and you will be glad you did!

**Zacchaeus** Day 21 Luke 19:1-10

The thing about Jesus is, everyone LOVED hanging out with him. Even people who made a lot of mistakes and bad choices knew that Jesus loved them, and so they would follow him and try to spend time with him because even though they didn't do everything right, Jesus never made them feel terrible about it.

In the book of Luke, there is a story about a man named Zacchaeus. Now, Zacchaeus was a tax collector, which meant he was Jewish, but he worked for the Romans. And no one really liked him. The Jewish people didn't like him because he took their money for taxes and paid the Roman government. And the Romans didn't like him because he was Jewish. So Zacchaeus was kind of lonely.

But one day Jesus is passing through and Zacchaeus had heard so much about this guy that he decided to stand on the side of the road to see if he could catch a glimpse of Jesus. The only problem was, Zacchaeus was short. Really short. And he couldn't see. So he climbed up a tree where he could get a better view. Well, just as Jesus was passing by, Jesus looked up in the tree, saw little Zacchaeus up there, hanging on to some tree branches, and called out, "Zacchaeus! I am going to have dinner at your house tonight!"

Can you imagine? Jesus just invited himself over! I bet Zacchaeus was nervous. I bet he wanted so badly to impress Jesus, and I bet he was worried Jesus wouldn't want to be his friend either.

But that's not what happened. Jesus came over, and all the religious people were mad, but Jesus didn't care and Zacchaeus didn't either. And while Jesus was there, Zacchaeus confessed that he knew he hadn't been making the best choices with his money, or the money he collected for taxes from other people. He had been taking extra and keeping some for himself! He had been stealing and lying! But Zacchaeus said he was going to change. That he would be more generous with his money and give more to others.

And what does Jesus do? He compliments Zacchaeus! **See, the religious leaders thought Zacchaeus had made too many mistakes to be considered a good man. But not Jesus. Jesus saw just that ONE right decision Zacchaeus had made and celebrated it.**

When you see someone making the right choice—even if there have been a lot of bad choices before this one—celebrate it! **Every good choice is a good decision and a chance to encourage someone who is working hard to do the right thing.** Instead of making someone feel like there is so much more to do to get better, make them feel good for getting something right, NOW!

What is one way you can encourage others when they make a good choice?

**Do not worry** Day 22 Matthew 6:25

Have you ever had a hard time falling asleep at night because you couldn't stop thinking about something that might happen the next day? Or been nervous to go to school, or go to a friend's house, or go to the doctor's office? There are a couple of words to explain what that feeling is. It's feeling anxious or unsettled, nervous, or uncertain. But maybe the word that explains it best is: WORRIED.

You can be worried about a lot of different things. But all of those things have something in common. Worrying has to do with the future, with what is coming up, with stuff that hasn't happened yet, but *might* happen later, or *will* happen later.

Worrying is easy to do and normal. Sometimes you are worried and you don't even realize you are! That's how easy it is to do.

**But one of the things Jesus tells us to do is NOT WORRY. Why would he say that? One reason is because He knows worry doesn't change what is going to happen, it just gives us something to do. Another reason He doesn't want us to worry is because worrying is really about not being in control and Jesus wants us to know, we aren't in control—BUT HE IS!**

That means when we are worried about something coming up at school, worried at home, worried with friends, worried about ANYTHING, we can tell Jesus we are worried about this, but we can trust him because we know He is with us, and that helps us worry less.

Next time you start to feel nervous, anxious or worried, try saying this:

**“Jesus, I am worried about\_\_\_\_\_. But worrying doesn't help. It just takes all my brain energy and uses it for something that doesn't change. Only YOU can help. I trust you to be with me when I am worried. Whether I'm worried about something that is going to happen, or something that *might* happen today, tomorrow or the day after that.”**

What is something you are worried about right now?  
What can you do to stop worrying and trust Jesus instead?

**Blessed are the merciful** Day 23  
Matthew 5

Before Jesus came, most people, when they thought of God, thought of rules, of a lot of stuff they had to do, and not do. But when Jesus came, He liked to tell stories, and talk about things that made people see God and see the world differently than they were used to.

In the most famous message Jesus ever taught, He stood on a hill that overlooked the Sea of Galilee and talked about the best way to live. One of the things He said was, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

What does that mean?

Blessed means that you will be happy if you show mercy. Mercy is another word for compassion, kindness and forgiveness. So Jesus is saying, you will be happy when you forgive others, because you will be forgiven too!

But there's another reason you will be happy when you forgive someone—like your brother or sister, or your parents, or a friend when they take something from you, laugh at you, hurt your feelings or act unfairly. **We are happy when we forgive these people because forgiving makes us free.**

Have you ever been stuck somewhere? In a shirt you can't get off your head, in a hiding spot that's too small, at the dinner table when you want to leave and play? When you are finally able to get out, it is THE BEST! It's such a good feeling. That's what forgiveness makes us feel.

It's hard. Because when you forgive someone it feels like you are saying what they did is okay, or that it doesn't bother you anymore. But that's not true. **Forgiving someone doesn't mean what they did to hurt you was right. And it doesn't mean you can't still be upset about it. It just means you are deciding to not let it keep you stuck.** You're deciding to be free, and that is a good decision to make.

So next time you need to forgive and you don't want to, remember this isn't about the other person. This is about you. Do you want to stay stuck? Or do you want to be free?

Forgiveness will make you free.

Who is someone you need to forgive? Why is it hard to forgive them? How do you think forgiving might make you feel better?

**The Great Debt** Day 24 Luke 7:36

There was one night where Jesus had dinner at the house of one of the religious leaders, named Simon. While he was there, a woman who people knew had made some unwise choices, and shown disrespect for herself and for others, came in and took a bottle of perfume, broke it, and used it to wash Jesus's feet, using her hair as a towel. (This sounds strange to us, but this was a way people showed affection and honor for people.) She cried as she did it—I think because Jesus was one of the first people who wasn't mad at her for her choices, but who loved her anyway.

The man whose house Jesus was at, Simon, was frustrated. *Didn't Jesus know about this woman? Didn't he know how many mistakes she had made? If He did, then He wouldn't let her wash His feet like that.*

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, but instead of correcting him, he told a story.

"There were once two men who owed a lot of money. One man owed a little and one owed a lot. One day, the man who they owed the money to came to them both and said, 'You don't have to pay me anything! You can keep your money!'" Then Jesus looked at Simon. "Simon, who do you think was the most grateful?"

Simon answered, "The man who owed the most amount of money."

"That's right," Jesus answered. And then he looked at the woman. "She's been forgiven of a lot. I've forgiven her. And because of that, she loves a lot. She shows me gratitude and honor because she knows her mistakes, but also because she knows my love."

The woman had done more to love Jesus and respect him—even though she had made bad choices—than Simon who hadn't made many mistakes at all. She had poured perfume on him and Simon had done nothing.

Do you know what this means? *It's okay to make mistakes, and good to admit your mistakes.* Because **the more you realize the mistakes you made, the more you realize how BIG and STRONG and POWERFUL Jesus' love is.** If you don't ever think you do anything wrong, you'll never think you need Jesus to love and forgive you. But when you admit your mistakes, your heart is more ready to see God's love and thank him for it.

One of the best things you could ever learn to do is admit when you've done something wrong. Because then you'll see better than you ever could have before, how much God loves you *anyway.*

**When it comes to God's love, show gratitude and not attitude.**

**What Comes From The Heart** Day 25 Luke 6:45

When I was about 10 years old I went to a friend's house for a sleepover party for her birthday. We were staying up WAY too late and my friend decided we were going to watch a scary movie. The movie was something my parents had told me I was not allowed to see. But I didn't want to be the only one not watching it, and I was kind of curious about it, and really, what was the big deal?

So I watched it. And you know what? It was *really scary*. More scary than I thought. And there were pictures in the movie that I STILL have in my head, even though now I am an adult and I have my own kids. *Those pictures haven't gone away*. And they still kind of freak me out.

When Jesus was on Earth, He spent a lot of time teaching about the connection between our minds or our hearts and our actions. He said they are connected. That **God doesn't just care about how you behave, He cares about what's going on in the inside**. Why did He care about that?

Because Jesus knew what is going on inside, effects what happens on the outside. One time when He was teaching he said, "What you say flows from your heart."

That means what we put in our hearts and what we put in our minds matters. And not just because you might have pictures from a scary movie in your head when you become a grown up. (Even though that is true.) It matters because **what you put inside of you, effects what comes out of you**.

It's why you don't eat sugar and junk food and candy if you want to do a great job exercising. Because the food you put in, matches the work you get out.

It's why we are careful with the books we read. The movies we see. The friends we hang around. The games we play. The television we watch. Because we know Jesus is right. What goes in will come out.

So, think of your mind like having a colander in it. Use the colander to let the stuff you want in you to pass through, and to keep out the stuff you don't want, out.

So what do you want to pass through the colander? What kind of movies and books should go through? And what should stay out? Decide to make some changes in and then pay attention. You may be surprised what starts coming out when you only put good stuff in!

**Help My Unbelief** Day 26 Mark 9:23-25

One of my favorite stories of Jesus is when He meets the father of a boy whose mind is really sick. The boy can't always talk and sometimes does things he doesn't want to do. And this dad feels helpless, because he's a dad, and all parents want to do is just take away anything that hurts their kids—to make it all just disappear. But nothing this dad does works.

And then this dad meets Jesus. He has no other options left. Doctors can't help. No one else knows what to do, so I think Jesus is kind of like his last option. Maybe He can do something to help his son.

The dad tells Jesus what is wrong and someone brings the boy to Jesus so He can see for himself. It's obvious how sick the boy is when Jesus sees him.

"Help him if you can," the dad says to Jesus.

And Jesus looks at him and says, "If I can? Anything is possible if a person believes."

And do you know what the dad says back to Jesus, to God's son, to the man who had been travelling around Israel and healing people all over the place?

"I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!"

I think it's the most honest prayer in the whole Bible. That's why I love it.

When you grow up going to church, you can start to think you *know* what God wants to hear from you. You pray trying to sound important or really good, maybe even trying to impress God a little bit. **But this dad's prayer is exactly what God is looking for from us. He wants our honesty. He doesn't want to hear certain words from you, He wants to hear exactly what is going on inside of your heart.**

Sometimes you need to pray just like this dad did. "I believe, but I don't believe. Help."

"I trust you. But sometimes I don't. Help."

"I love you. But sometimes it's hard. Help."

"I know you are in control. But sometimes it doesn't feel like it. Help"

**Jesus cares more about what's actually going on inside of you, than the words you are praying to him. So tell him!** Everything! He can handle it. Nothing you say surprises Him, makes him mad or hurts His feelings. He just wants to hear from YOU.

What's one thing you can pray about today that you need help with?

**Healing on the Sabbath** Day 27 Luke 13:10

When Jesus was born there were 613 rules the Jewish people had to follow. 613!!!! That is a lot of rules. Can you imagine how hard that must have been for people to remember? The rules weren't just annoying, the religious leaders took them very seriously, so there wasn't a lot of grace if you messed up.

But when Jesus started teaching, the religious leaders noticed something. He didn't seem to care as much about the laws as they did. One time, someone needed help, and the day they needed help was on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is like Sunday for Jewish people. Except one of the 613 rules was that you were not allowed to do any work on the Sabbath. *None.* Sure, not doing any work sounds great! But when they said what was considered work, things started to get kind of complicated.

They decided to walk was work.

To cook was work.

To fix something that was broken was work.

Basically, all you could do was just SIT. And be bored.

Well, Jesus sees this person who needs help, and you will never guess what He did. Without even stopping to think about it, he heals them! And guess what? The religious leaders were MAD. Why? Because they thought healing was WORK!

They got mad at Jesus because He hadn't followed the rules. Not only that, Jesus didn't think it was a big deal. He treated the rules like they didn't matter as much. And when the leaders told Jesus how mad they were do you know what Jesus said? He basically told them, "People first."

See, Jesus knew that if we aren't careful, we can start to make rules more important than people, and so He wanted the teachers to see that no rule is more important than helping someone. **People should ALWAYS come first. Always. And if we care more about keeping a rule than loving a person, we're actually wrong.**

Can you think of a time when a person might be more important than a rule? What is something you do to make sure people know you think they are important?

**The House On The Rock** Day 28 Matthew 7:24-27

What's the hardest thing about building a sand castle? (Besides keeping other kids from stepping on it and ruining everything!) I think it's deciding where to build it. Build it too close to edge of the water and one big wave takes the whole thing out. Build it too far back, and the sand isn't damp enough to hold it together. And then no matter where you build it, when you come back the next day, to the same spot you were the day before? The sand castle's gone. All your work is erased.

Compared to the amount of time it takes to build a regular house—out of wood and bricks and concrete, a sand castle is super easy. You can be done in just an hour or so! But the problem is the water. You can finish earlier. But your house will fall apart sooner. A house built on land with sturdy materials will take months to finish. But when it's done? It's not going anywhere. A rainstorm won't make it go away. A bucket of water won't make it fall apart. It's sturdy.

Jesus told a story of two men who built houses. One man built a house on sand. And the other built his house on rock. When the rains came, the man who had built his house on the sand watched his house be destroyed. All that work, and just like that, it was gone. But the man who built his house on the rock?

The wind blew.  
The rain fell down.  
And the house stayed.

Do you know what Jesus said? People who LISTEN to his words, and then DO what he says, are like the man who built his house on the rock.

It can take a long time to learn how to do it. It can be challenging. You can make mistakes and wonder why you decided to do what Jesus asked you to do (like love others who are hard to love, forgive, be patient, be kind, not get angry so easily) BUT, when you do it, you are building a life that is going to be able to survive some hard things.

**Every time you make a decision to LISTEN to God and DO what God says, you are building a sturdier house. And you are that house!** You are making yourself more strong and more powerful and more capable. Choose to LISTEN and then DO, and even though it takes longer, you won't regret it! Because you are building a house that can stand up to almost anything!

**Jesus liked to have fun** Day 29 John 2:1-11

You know what some of my best memories are as a family? They almost all have something to do with having FUN. Like a trip to Disney World or to the beach. But fun isn't just about doing big trips. I think some of our best family memories are from playing games together, or going to get ice cream, or MOVIE NIGHT!!!!

Having fun makes great memories. And you know what else? It makes you like the people you are having fun with, even more!

This may sound strange, but when we are having a good time together as a family or with our friends, do you know what God is doing? *He's having fun too.* He's smiling with us, and laughing with us, and He is just SO HAPPY that we are happy! (I bet He wishes he could pull up a chair and share the popcorn with us on our Friday movie night.)

But for some reason, some people have a hard time believing God likes fun. They picture God very serious. With a frown on His face. And grumpy eyes. And always asking people to keep it down and to stop looking like you are having a good time, because the one thing God hates more than anything else (they think) is people enjoying themselves.

Isn't that crazy???? Of course that's not true! And do you know how I know?

Because of Jesus. Boy, did that guy like to have a good time! The very first miracle He performed was at a wedding—which is a big PARTY and celebration—and they had run out of wine, and so do you know what he did? He got a big barrel of water and turned the WHOLE THING into wine! Why? Because he didn't want the party to end! He wanted people to keep having fun!

Jesus went over to people's houses all the time to laugh and to eat and drink good drinks. And people saw how much He enjoyed it and started whispering, "That Jesus guy enjoys food just a little too much. I don't know about Him." Of course, Jesus knew what people were saying about Him. What do you think He did when He heard it? Did He tell his new friends, "Sorry guys, I need to be more boring. I have to go."

Of course not! He said, "Oh well!" And kept having fun.

Don't ever think you are loving God more only when you are praying or at church or reading the Bible. You are loving God when you enjoy His creation, when you play with your friends, when you laugh so hard at the dinner table you think the fizzy drink is going to come out of your nose. **Laughing and smiling and FUN is a way to love God too. And when you do those things and thank God for them, you will get to know God more and like Him even more.**

Remember: God is FOR fun and He is FOR you!

What is the most fun you have ever had?

### The People Jesus Hung Out With Day 30 Mark 2:13-17

Back when Jesus was alive, the Temple was the place where people would go to worship God. The Temple was different from the churches we have today because it had different layers—like an onion does. At the very center of the Temple was a place called the Holy of Holies. This is where they thought God's spirit actually lived. In this one tiny room. NO ONE was allowed to go in there. It was too special a place—except for one time a year. On the Jewish holiday called the Day of Atonement, one priest was allowed to go to the room. That's it. Outside the Holy of Holies, there was the Court of the Priests. Only priests were allowed to go in that far. Outside of that was Court of Israel. You had to be a man and Jewish to go this far. Outside of that was the Court of the Women. Women could go no further than this. And finally, the farthest away from the Holy of Holies, there was the Outer Court of the Gentiles. If you weren't Jewish, you couldn't get any closer. (That would have been us!)

Before Jesus, people just assumed the people that were closest to God were the people who got the farthest into the Temple. That meant the priests were really close to God and the people who weren't Jewish and who were women, weren't close to God at all.

This is one of the reasons why people were so amazed with Jesus. Because He was God's son—as close as you can get to God—but He didn't hang out with the priests! He hung out with women and Gentiles—the people who could hardly go into the Temple at all! If you were a Jewish priest, this was very confusing. Actually, it made them more than confused. It made them angry. They liked to think they had special access to God, that God liked them more, that they were more important than everyone else.

But when you read the stories about Jesus you see He makes sure to spend time with the people who would have been on the very edges of the Temple. There were several women who travelled with Him and the disciples, and who were his good friends. Like Mary and Martha. He visited towns that had Gentiles and not just Jewish people. He told stories where people who weren't Jewish were the heroes. And then there are the people he would eat with and spend time with. The tax collectors. (Nobody liked them.) The sick. (People were too afraid to get close to them.) The people who had made bad choices over and over again. (People were afraid they would get in trouble just by being close to them.)

The point is, Jesus made certain He hung out with the people on the edges of the Temple, people no one else liked, and no one thought God would like.

No matter how old you are, there are going to be people who are on the edges. People who don't have a lot of friends. People who may be kind of annoying, or kind of frustrating, or people who just don't get noticed at all. By anyone. These are the people Jesus made sure he spent time with. And I want you to do the same. **By showing kindness, by being a friend, by paying attention to the people no one else does you are sending a very important message. You are telling them, just by being a friend, that God loves them and notices them.** And that you do too.

Pay attention. Look around. And be a friend.

**Breakfast with Peter** Day 31 John 18:13-17; 21:12-19

The night Jesus was arrested, the disciples were scared. They thought if people knew they had been friends with Jesus they would be arrested and get in trouble too. But, they wanted to know what was going to happen to their friend. So they hung around where Jesus was taken, trying to not be seen.

Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends who was a disciple, sat down by a campfire with a young girl there too. "Hey!" she said. "Weren't you one of those guys who hung around Jesus?"

How would you have responded if you had been Peter? Peter was terrified. "No!" he answered quickly. "Not me! You must be thinking of someone else."

The girl looked at him again. "No, I'm pretty sure I saw you with him. You talk like you are from the same place He was."

"You have the wrong guy!" Peter told her, his voice rising. One more time she tries to get him to admit what she is sure is true. And again, he denies it. And then Peter started crying because Peter was certain he would be brave enough to stay by Jesus and defend Jesus no matter what. But he hadn't. He had lied to a girl and been a coward.

Skipping ahead in the story, Jesus is killed, buried and then, brought back to life. And a couple of days after Jesus comes back, He is on the beach with the disciples cooking the fish they had just caught over a fire on the shore for breakfast.

"Peter," Jesus begins, looking at his friend—and Peter moves around uncomfortably, and feels nervous and ashamed because he's afraid what Jesus will say and that Jesus will be mad.

"Peter, do you love me?" Jesus asks. And Peter, so grateful for another chance, thankful he can make right what he messed up, eagerly looks into Jesus' eyes. "Yes, Lord! You know I do."  
"Then feed my sheep," Jesus tells him.

Two more times Jesus asks Peter this question, and two more times Peter answers him. Three times Peter had denied he knew Jesus and then three times, Peter had the chance to make it right.

Here's why this story matters. Because Peter *really* messed up. Maybe more than any other disciple. And he was certain this mistake would make Jesus abandon him, since he had abandoned Jesus. And he was positive Jesus would be angry and punish him. But Jesus does the exact opposite. Jesus has breakfast with Peter. He says his name. And he looks in Peter's eyes and by saying what He does, He is telling Peter, "You're okay. More than okay. I have a job for you. To take care of the people who follow me when I'm not here anymore." And would you believe it? That's exactly what Peter did. He started the first church! And you know what? If it weren't for Peter and for the second chance Jesus gave him, we wouldn't know who Jesus was or what He did. So, here's what I know. **NOTHING you do will make Jesus give up on you. Nothing takes you out of the game. Nothing makes you someone Jesus won't use or do something inside. Nothing. It's true for Peter and it is true for you.**

**Triumphal Entry** Day 32 Matthew 21:1-11

Sunday is exactly one week before Easter. We call it Palm Sunday.

Jesus had been teaching in the area outside of Jerusalem, but He knew the time was getting closer for Him to head back to the city, because that was where He would be when He was eventually arrested and crucified. So, He asked the disciples to get a donkey ready for Him to ride. That may seem like a strange thing to ask for, but the Jewish people thought their king would ride a donkey into the city of Jerusalem, and that is how they would know their leader arrived. So when the crowds saw Jesus on the donkey, and they had already heard of what He was able to do—healing people and teaching the most amazing stories—they thought,

“This is our king! This is who we have been waiting for! This is the leader who will free us from the Romans and make us in charge and give us the power we want!!”

Then they took palm tree branches and they waved them at Jesus, and put them on the road for the donkey to walk on top of. It was like a huge celebration! People cheered and yelled and waved and cried out! Finally, their Messiah, their king, had arrived!

Only Jesus knew what would happen five days later, that everyone would change their minds. Jesus came into the city being treated like a king, but He left, on His way to be put on the cross.

Have you ever expected a person to be one way, and then they acted another way? Or have you expected one thing to happen, but then something else happened?

**Expectations are what you think is going to happen. Sometimes you don't even know you expect anything, until afterwards and you feel disappointed or upset, or even mad or sad.**

Sometimes you realize you have expectations when Christmas comes and goes, or you have a friend over, or you go on a trip and it doesn't go like you imagined. You thought it would be one way, but it ended up being another. It can be really disappointing.

The people expected a powerful king. But they got Jesus—a man who served others and loved His enemies. They got something even better, even if they didn't know it yet. **Jesus doesn't always act like we expect. But we can believe that He is even better than we imagine Him to be.** So even if our expectations aren't met with Jesus, ask yourself what you think you are learning about Him that is better than you thought.

When is a time you expected one thing and you got something else? How did you make yourself not feel upset? Have you ever gotten something better than you expected? What is a way to not let your expectations control your emotions?

**Why Questions Matter** Day 33 Matthew 8:26

The Bible is a collection of smaller books and has two parts. The Old Testament is the part that was written before Jesus was born and the New Testament is written after Jesus was born. The first four books in the New Testament are called the gospels—by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of these books talks about the time Jesus was here on earth. They share a lot of the same stories, but there are things in each book that makes them each unique. I love that we have four different ways to look at Jesus's life and that we get to see what each writer thought was important to include about Him.

One thing that you notice in all four gospels is that Jesus loved to ask questions. In fact, He asked a total of 307 questions in the gospels, was asked 183, and only *answered* three! Sometimes religious leaders would ask him questions to see if they could trick Him or catch Him saying something that could get Him in trouble. Sometimes people would ask Him questions about whether He would do something to help them.

But Jesus didn't just answer the questions people asked him. He asked questions back!

**Jesus knew the best way to get to know someone is through questions. Is by being curious. So that's what He did. He knew people were usually asking about a problem they might have, but He wanted to know about them as people. He wanted them to feel like they actually knew Him and He actually knew them. So He didn't just teach people. He got to know people.**

One the best ways you can learn to be a friend, is by asking questions about a person. **Be curious about others! Nothing makes someone feel more important than a person taking the time to get to know them.** This is true with kids and adults.

When you see a neighbor, a teacher or a friend, ask: How was your day today?

When you talk to your grandparents or aunts and uncles and cousins, ask: How have you been?

Then (and this is where things can get tricky) after they answer, *ask another question back.*

The reason this can be so hard is because that means you really have to pay attention to what someone says back to you—because if you don't you won't have another question to ask, or you'll ask something that doesn't make sense! But when you decide to put people first, you will learn how to listen well and ask questions well.

When you learn how to ask questions to other people, guess what? You are becoming more like Jesus. And you are becoming a better friend!

So, start practicing today!

**Lazarus Day 34 John 11: 1-44**

One of the ways Jesus is like us is, He had friends just like you do! The disciple John tells us about Jesus' good friends, two sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. But one day, Jesus learns that His friend Lazarus has gotten sick, and even worse? He died. And Jesus, like a good friend would, went to the house of His friends to visit. I'm going to skip to the end of the story and tell you that Jesus ends up performing one of his biggest miracles ever when He gets there.

Lazarus, who had been dead for days, is in a cave, and Jesus stands outside and shouts,

“Lazarus, come out!”

You can probably guess what happened. Lazarus comes out—alive!! Nobody expected that Jesus would bring His friend back from the dead!

But before that happened, there's an important part of the story we skipped. When Jesus got to the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stood outside Lazarus's grave, and He cried. The kind of crying where you can't catch your breath, where your nose runs, and your shoulders shake and it feels like not just this one sad thing has happened, but suddenly *everything* feels sad. It all feels like too much to handle.

I think it's so interesting John tells us Jesus cried, because Jesus knew what He was going to do. He knew He could bring Lazarus back and that He would in just a couple of minutes! So why did He cry?

I think it's because **Jesus wanted us to know it's okay to be sad when sad things happen**. Jesus knew that. And I want to make sure you know that too. That **crying doesn't make you less tough or less brave**. (Not even a little bit. It's actually the opposite. You are *more* brave when you let yourself cry and be sad when sad things happen.) It doesn't make you not trust God. It doesn't mean you don't celebrate when there is stuff to celebrate. **Being willing to cry and be sad when life is sad makes you like Jesus**. Life is full of a lot of really happy things and a lot of really sad things, and God made you to smile for the good stuff and cry for the hard stuff. When you are sad, you are acting just like God made you to act. And when you are happy, you are acting just like God made you to act.

Don't stop feeling the good or the bad. We need both. Not only that. Jesus wants to hear about what makes you sad. (I do too.) So don't be afraid to feel sad and talk about it.

**The Lord's Prayer** Day 35 Matthew 6:9-13, Matthew 14:36

When I was a little girl, I prayed the same prayer every night before I went to bed.

"Now I lay be down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. I pray for..."

And then I would list every single person I could think of. I would start with family and then do aunts and uncles and friends and teachers and neighbors...until finally I fell asleep in the middle of my prayer.

Do you ever wonder if there is a "right" way to pray? Like maybe if you pray a certain way, you will get what you ask for, or God will like it better? I think sometimes we worry so much about getting the right words out, or we just say the words we always say, like I did as a little girl, that we don't really think about what prayer really is. So what is it?

A conversation!

When Jesus was teaching the people about prayer, He started by saying, "Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy."

And then later? When Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, after He has eaten with the disciples, and right before He is arrested, He prays and it's like we get to listen in to what He says. Do you know how He starts?

"Abba, Father"

Abba is a word that meant "Dad" or "Daddy". Jesus is praying just like He told us to! And even better, He says we get to talk to God like He is our dad too! That means when you pray, you don't have to worry about saying the right words, or sounding important or just repeating what you say every night. Think about how you talk to your Dad, or another grown-up you love. Think about how at night you'll sometimes say, "Mom, I want to have a conversation." Or, "Dad, I want to talk." That is EXACTLY how God wants you to talk to Him! You can say, "God, I want to have a conversation. God, I want to have a talk." And then say whatever you want!

The thing I love most about how Jesus tells us to pray and then how He prays himself, is that He always prays, "I would like this to happen, but I know You are in charge. So if it doesn't happen, I trust you." That's what He prayed the night before He died. He knew what was going to happen and He asked God to stop it. But then He said, "But I want what you want. So if this has to happen, I will obey you."

What a great way to think about prayer. **Start by talking to God like He is your dad. And end telling Him no matter what it might feel like, you know He is in charge.**

What's something you haven't talked to God about, but you want to, now?

**Jesus washing Disciples feet** Day 36 John 13:1-17

In the last meal that Jesus would spend with his followers, once everyone arrived at the house where they were eating, Jesus took a bowl of water and a towel, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples.

Feet stink. They do now and they did then. But they actually stunk worse then because everyone wore sandals and the roads were made of dirt, and if an animal had to go the bathroom, they would just go right there in the middle of street where anyone could step in it! So, when you went to someone's house, there was usually a servant whose job it was to wash the feet of the people coming inside. Because no way did you want to bring in all of that nastiness into the house!

But there was no servant at this house, and the disciples weren't exactly fighting over who got to do the job. Maybe they were doing rock, paper, scissors to decide who would get stuck having to do the dirty work, but while they were trying to figure out who would be stuck with the grossest job of all, Jesus goes and gets the bowl and towel and starts doing it Himself.

Here He was, the most important guy in the room, the most important guy in the world (even though the world didn't know it yet) and He starts doing the dirtiest job there was to do. He got on His knees and He picked up Peter's foot—covered in mud, needing his toenails to be clipped, with blisters on the bottom, and sweat dried into them—and He dips His towel in the water and starts to scrub off the dirt from the day.

Jesus didn't have to do it. But there was a reason He did. Because **the thing Jesus did best was make the people around Him feel BIG**. Even if it meant he felt little. **He was always looking for a chance to make others feel valuable and important and like they mattered. Even if that meant He had to touch their stinky, nasty feet. Because He knew the thing people remember most about us, are the ways we make them feel.**

Who is someone you can make feel BIG today?  
What can you do to make them feel that way?

**The Last Supper** Day 37 Mark 14:12-26

Isn't it funny how food is connected to our memories? When I eat crab dip, I think of the beach. When I eat popcorn, I think of movie nights. When I eat buffalo chicken dip, I think of football games. And when I drink hot chocolate I think of snowy days. What about you?

The night before Jesus was arrested, when He and the disciples were in the Upper Room, they were celebrating the Jewish holiday of Passover. Passover was what reminded them about Moses and their ancestors being slaves in Egypt, and how Moses had led them to the Promised Land and how God had kept them safe.

When they celebrated, they would eat bread and drink wine as part of the holiday. But this night, in the upper room, Jesus takes the bread and He breaks it. And then he looks at the disciples and tells them this bread is like his body, which will be broken for them. Then he takes the wine and He drinks it, and passes it around for them to drink, telling them, this wine is like His blood, spilled for them.

This would have been confusing to the disciples. Why was Jesus trying to change the whole holiday meal? They didn't know that in just a few hours Jesus would be on the cross, dying for them.

And after Jesus did that, He looks at each of the men around Him and says, "When you eat and when you drink, *remember me.*"

He wanted to have a food memory like we do with certain things. He wanted to make sure whenever they ate this bread or drank that wine, that Jesus would be the first person to come to their mind.

What do you think Jesus wanted them to remember about him?

When you remember Jesus, what do you think about?

I think about:

How much He loves us.

How He wanted to make sure we knew how much God loves us.

How He served others.

How He was friends with everyone.

How He put other people first.

**Jesus lived such a loving life, that when people remembered him, that's what they remembered. How much he loved.**

What do you want to be remembered for? What are you doing today to make sure that is how you are remembered?

**Dying on the cross.** Day 38 Luke 23:43-46

Today is what we call Good Friday. Which sort of seems like a strange name because today is the day Jesus died on the cross.

Late the night before, after eating with His friends, and praying in the garden, the soldiers came and arrested Jesus. No one expected this to happen. Especially because just one week earlier, Jesus had come into Jerusalem with crowds cheering for Him and putting palm branches in the road, treating Him like a king. But then today? The crowds were cheering to kill Him.

So why were the crowds so angry? Well, they expected Jesus to be one way, when He was actually very different. They wanted a super powerful leader who would kick the Romans out of Israel. Who would save the Jewish people and put them in charge. Jesus kept telling them He wasn't that kind of a leader, but they didn't believe Him. And then, He was arrested and put on a cross and the idea they had of what they thought He was, didn't seem possible anymore. Jesus let Himself be arrested and beaten up and then put on a cross.

For thousands of years God had been talking to Israel through their kings, and their prophets, and the priests in the temple. He had messages about what He was like and what He wanted to do in the world.

**But when God sent Jesus to earth and when Jesus was on the cross, nobody was confused any more about what God was like. We don't need kings, priests or prophets or any other messenger to tell us. We just look at Jesus!**

**What is God like? He's like love.**

A love so big and powerful and amazing and surprising, that it was willing to die to show us how much we mean to God. Because of Jesus we never have to wonder what God thinks about us. (He loves us! He likes us! He loves us to the moon and back! To infinity and back! Times a trillion!) However much you imagine God loves you, THINK BIGGER. There is no end to his love for you! And that is the best news yet.

**Holy Saturday.** Day 39

Have you ever read a book or watched a movie and a really sad part happens? Like in *The Good Dinosaur*, or *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, or *Charlotte's Web*? It's when you read a book or watch a movie where there is a part so sad, you think what you just read or what just happened can't be true. Where it makes you so upset you want to turn the movie off. Or close the book. Or just get *mad* because it doesn't seem right.

If you've ever felt that way (and I have) I bet you felt something close to what the disciples felt the day after Jesus had died.

Like they couldn't believe this actually happened.

Like it couldn't be real.

Like they wanted to forget everything that had happened.

Maybe they even felt mad because Jesus was gone and they felt like they had been tricked.

**Sometimes the best stories have a part so terrible and hard and sad, that you are ready to quit the story completely, a part that seems too terrible to keep reading, and too awful to keep watching.**

**But the lesson on the Saturday between the day Jesus died and the day Jesus came back, is that, as sad as the story gets, *the story isn't over*.** Even if it feels over. Good always wins. Even when it feels like bad is winning right now. Happy endings are coming, even if it all feels like a sad ending right now.

Don't skip the end of the story because of the sadness right now. In the story and in real life. Hang in there!! Keep waiting!!! **You never know what God is doing in the saddest parts. You never know when the story might turn...**

What's story or movie that felt so sad you didn't think you could finish?  
When have you see God take something sad and make it better?

**Easter** Day 40 John 20:1-18

TODAY IS THE DAY!!!!!! IT'S EASTER!!!!!! JESUS IS ALIVE!!!!!!

Today is about a lot of things. First of all, it's about Jesus keeping His promises. He told the disciples He would leave and He would come back, and when Peter and John and Mary went to the tomb and saw it was empty, and then saw Jesus alive, they knew Jesus could be trusted. He did what He said he was going to do.

**So anything Jesus says, we can trust.**

**That He will be with us,**

**that good always wins,**

**that we have nothing to fear.**

**Trust, trust, trust.**

**True, true, true.**

The other thing about today, is it shows how patient Jesus is. He had told everyone what would happen, and when it did, He wasn't mad they didn't believe. He didn't say, "Ugh! Why don't you listen to me?!" No, He met His friends in a garden and then again in a crowded room, and then again on a beach, and while they just tried to make sense of what happened, He smiled and stayed close and cooked them breakfast. He was so patient with them. He is so patient with us.

Finally, **Easter reminds us that something good can always come out of something bad.** See, Jesus told us life would be hard. That bad things would happen. That things that don't make any sense would confuse us and make us wonder about God and if He was really as good as we want Him to be. We can count on life being difficult. But **Easter is all about something being more true than life just being hard.** Easter is about something new and something good happening in something old and something bad.

It's like a new flower poking through the dirt after a long and cold winter.

It's like a new baby smiling at his mama and daddy, after a long night of crying and no sleep.

It's like the first day of summer vacation after a long year of getting up early for school and working hard to make it to the end.

**That's Easter. (Except about a million times better.) The moment something good arrives after something really hard. When death comes back to life!**

We have spent 40 DAYS preparing for Easter. And now it's here! And it's the end of your book, but you know what? It's really just the beginning. Easter isn't the end of something, it's the start of something! We need to celebrate not just today, but tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and the day after that, and a random Thursday and Saturday and Tuesday, because Easter is good news today, but also good news everyday!

So, what do you say? Let's celebrate!!!!