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**THIS JOURNAL WAS PRESENTED TO**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**ON THE** \_\_\_\_\_ **DAY OF** \_\_\_\_\_ **20** \_\_\_\_\_

**BY** \_\_\_\_\_

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# DEAR FRIEND,

You've made a significant decision this week, a decision to walk the rest of your life in partnership with God. This journal was created to help you take your first steps over the next two weeks.

Here's what you need to know to get started:

1. Take 20 minutes each day.
2. Get away by yourself, away from distractions.
3. Read the Bible verses, then the journal text. Answer the journal questions, and work through the prayer.
4. Begin the journal on the last day of camp with the first entry, "Before You Leave Camp."

Your Young Life leader will want to meet with you periodically to discuss your journal, but the contents of your journal are strictly confidential. You will not be asked to share anything that you don't want to share. Your leader will be meeting with you to encourage you, cheer you on, answer any questions you have, and discuss anything you would like to discuss. If you purchased this journal on your own, be sure to tell your leader so he or she can begin making plans to meet with you. If your leader purchased it for you, be sure to ask what the plan is for getting together.

The journey you've begun with God is the most significant journey of your life. Take these next two weeks to get started on the right foot. Remember, you won't be walking alone. God and your Young Life leader will be walking with you.

Donna Hatasaki

P.S. You won't need a Bible until Day Four. The verses will be printed for you until then. If you need a Bible, tell your Young Life leader. He or she will get you one right away!



# BEFORE YOU LEAVE CAMP

## From the Bible

*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left ... One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him:*

*“Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:32, 33, 39-43).*

## The Journey Begins ...

The journey begins. Camp is over, but the journey is just beginning. That is, the journey you’ve begun with Jesus. The journey that started with one quiet moment. The journey that will never end.

This journey began with one quiet moment between you and Jesus. Maybe it was a quiet moment under the stars. Maybe it was a quiet moment lying in bed. Maybe it was a quiet moment in the midst of a crazy crowd of two or three hundred teenagers. Whatever the case, at some point this week, there was a quiet moment when you looked at Jesus, He looked at you, an eternal transaction was made, and the journey began.

This journey never ends. In that quiet moment with Jesus, you took your first step into eternal life. Eternal life is more than just a never-ending version of this life. Eternal life has quality all its own. It springs up from inside of someone who has begun a journey with Jesus. And eternal life doesn’t end at the grave. At the grave, eternal life finally kicks into full swing.

Life seemed to be over for the criminal on the cross. But in reality his journey was just beginning. In a quiet moment, in the midst of a cruel crucifixion, the thief looked at Jesus, Jesus looked at him, an eternal transaction was made, and the journey began. Without ever leaving the cross, the thief took his first step into eternal life with the words, “Jesus, remember me ...” Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” For the thief, physical life was over, but his journey into eternal life had only just begun.

For you, the journey to Young Life camp is over. It’s time to go home. But because of one quiet moment you shared with Jesus this week, your real journey has only just begun. And if you think camp was great – hang

on to your hat! Camp is nothing compared to where you're headed with Jesus! Your journey to camp is over, but your journey to *paradise* has only just begun.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. You've made an eternal transaction with Jesus this week. What was exchanged in this transaction? *Lives*. You gave your life to Jesus, He gave His life to you. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." You will want to always remember this transaction.
  - When, where and how did your quiet moment with the Lord occur?
2. The thief on the cross began his eternal journey with the Lord with the simple request, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." There are no magic words we must use to begin a relationship with Jesus. He hears the silent language of our hearts.
  - Do you remember what you said to Jesus to begin your relationship with Him? Write what you can remember of it here:

*Dear God,*

*This really has been one of the best weeks of my life. But I think that's because it's been the first week of my life with You.*

*Thanks for that quiet moment we shared this week. Thanks for the journey we've begun together.*

*We're on the road to paradise, Lord! And I'm looking forward to spending many more quiet moments with You along the way.*

*Forever yours.*

# DAY ONE AT HOME

## From the Bible

*Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.*

*"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.*

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's make a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:11-24).*

## The Journey Begins at Home ...

Home again. You've just spent a wild week at Young Life camp, but you're ... home again. This time last week you were waking up to a full day of ropes, rides and general rowdiness. Today you're waking up to the sobering reality that camp is history and you're already ... home again.

Just a few hours ago you stepped off a sticky bus onto hometown asphalt. What a shock! Not only did your hair wake up on the wrong side of the bus, but your luggage wasn't where you'd left it either. And before you could locate your bus-breath survival kit (a.k.a. chewing gum), you were pelted with minty-fresh questions from a well-bathed buddy from home.

"How was it? Did you get some good pictures?" What did you do at that Young Life camp, anyway?"

"Good question," you think to yourself. "What *did* I do at that Young Life camp?" This week is already beginning to fade like old photographs from a scrapbook.

What did you do at camp? A lot. More than your memory and even 10 scrapbooks could contain. After all, the most significant thing you did at camp you couldn't capture with any camera in the world. You began a journey with Jesus. Just *try* and picture *that*.

Fortunately, Jesus has pulled some pictures from His verbal scrapbook and laid them on the table in Luke 15 that capture clearly what you did at camp:

There's a picture of a father with a lot of wealth, but only two real treasures – his sons.

There's a picture of his son who thinks he knows best how to live his life – fast and free.

There's a picture of a broken-hearted father who loves his son enough to let him go.

There's a picture of a son with his pockets full of money, his condo full of friends, his car full of females, and his heart full of ... nothing.

*Turn the page.*

The photographs fade from festive color into hollow black and white.

There's a picture of depression – financial and psychological. The car and the condo have been repossessed. The son's friends have left him with the last dollar bill. His old friends wore silk and dined on caviar. His new companions wear mud and eat corn husks.

There's a picture of a son lying alone in the dirt.

There's a picture of a father waiting alone on a porch.

*Turn the page.*

There's a picture of a son shuffling slowing up his father's drive. He's dirty, and his head is hanging low.

He's practicing in a low mumble, 'I was wrong, Dad. I was wrong.'

There's a picture of a father bounding off his front porch, running toward his son.

There's a picture of a son freezing in his tracks, bracing himself for a verbal beating.

But ... *there's no picture of a beating.*

There's a picture of a father throwing his arms around his son and kissing him on the neck.

There's a picture of a father crying, 'Welcome home, Son.'

*There's a picture of what you did at Young Life camp.*

You heard the truth at camp that you were created to live life at home with God the Father, enjoying His company every day, talking with Him at great lengths about anything that concerned you, relaxing in the comfort of His care and protection.

You heard as well that each of us, at some point, has left home. There's a photograph in God's scrapbook of each of us walking away from Him down the path of independent living. Like the son in the story, however, you and I, and many like us, have discovered that independent living isn't all it's cracked up to be. Somewhere in the middle of our aimless wanderings through broken relationships, confusion and loneliness, we began to get homesick.

Maybe you weren't homesick for God until you got to camp. Maybe you had forgotten about the Father altogether until you caught a glimpse of Him in a friend or in something the speaker had to say. On the other hand, maybe you had been missing the Father for quite awhile and had come to camp in hopes that someone would be able to show you the way home. And someone did.

Now there's a photograph in God's scrapbook of you shuffling up the Father's drive. But while you were still a long way off, the Father bounded off the porch and ran to greet you. He could hardly hear you mumbling, 'I was wrong, Father,' because He was so busy shouting to His help, 'We're going to have a party!' You may have been expecting a beating, but instead the Father threw His arms around you, kissed you on the neck, looked you in the eye and said, 'Welcome home, child. Welcome home.'

Home again. You've just spent the past 15-16-17 years living life out on your own, but you're home again! This time last week you were waking up to another day of shuffling down life's path alone, wondering where you fit in, if anybody really cared. Today you're waking up to the incredible reality that spiritual homelessness is history because you're finally home again ... with God.

What did you do at Young Life camp? You began a journey with Jesus. And, in this case, the journey begins at home.

# QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Coming home from camp can be a shock to your system. For starters, you may feel lonely. After all, you've just spent the past week with a few hundred friends, and suddenly you're back in single-digit company.

- Circle below any of the emotions you're experiencing on the return home:

Loneliness

Relief

Anxiety

Excitement

Fear

Enthusiasm

Boredom

Anticipation

Satisfaction

Confusion

- Give a brief explanation of how you're feeling and why:

2. **Feelings** come and go; **facts** stay the same. Regardless of how you **feel** today about coming home to your house or coming home to God, the fact remains that you've come home in both cases. To the best of your ability, state the facts about what you did at camp when you came home to **God**.

**To help you get started:** First, I realized I was created to live life with God. Next I ...

*Father,*

*It's good to be home with You. I don't really understand all that's happened to me, but I do know that something inside of me is finally at rest, like it's finally at home where it belongs.*

*Thank You for welcoming me back and forgiving me. I'm looking forward to living life at home with You.*

# DAY TWO AT HOME

## From the Bible

*“My Father’s house has many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

*Thomas said to Him, “Lord we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:2-6).*

## The Way Home

Someone at camp showed you the way home to God, and you took it. What was *the way*? How did you get to God? Did you click a pair of ruby slippers together and chant, “There’s no place like home?” Did you follow a Hansel and Gretel-like trail of 10 commandments through the forest of good behavior to get home to God?

Neither wishful thinking nor good behavior can get a person back home to God. The only path to the Father is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ.

How can a path be a person or a person be a path? Consider this story:

A father and his small child are walking along a low-water bridge one afternoon. When the father isn’t looking, the child creeps too close to the edge of the bridge and slips into the swift current of the river below. The child screams, and the father jumps into the water on instinct to save him. The father swims to the child who has managed to cling to a rock, jutting out of the water mid-stream. The father calls out, “Grab hold of my neck! I’ll pull you to shore!” The son throws himself onto his father’s neck, clings for his life, and is pulled safely across the current to solid ground.

In this story, a person is a path. The father is a child’s only path to safety.

Before Jesus died, He tried to comfort His friends with this thought, “Don’t worry about me, guys. I’m going back to the Father. And you’ll be following along before you know it.”

His friends were confused, to say the least. “Lord, how do we get there?” They pleaded. “Show us the way.”

Jesus didn’t pull out a pair of ruby slippers nor a road map of good behavior. He pointed to Himself and said, “I am the way ... No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

The only path to God the Father is a person, and the Person is Jesus Christ.

You and I are like small children in danger of drowning in the raging current of sin and rebellion in our lives. Our only hope for salvation is to throw ourselves onto Jesus and let Him carry us safely home to God.

It would have been foolish for the child in the story to refuse his father's neck, cling to the rock instead and mumble, "I want to be on shore. I really want to be on shore." He could not will his way back to safety. It would be just foolish for you and me to ignore Jesus Christ and try instead to will our way home to God. No matter how badly we'd like to be home with the Father, if we refuse to cling to Christ in the process, we're only going nowhere fast.

It would have been more than foolish for the child in the story to let go of the rock and try to work his way to safety. He wasn't strong enough to fight the current. He would have been swept away to sure death and destruction. Likewise, we cannot work our way to God by following a trail of 10 commandments, or any other code of good behavior. We're not strong enough to fight the current of self-centeredness and rebellion in our life that is sure to sweep us away to spiritual death and destruction.

The only way we can get to God is through a person, Jesus Christ. Why is Jesus the only way? Jesus is the only person who is able to both will and work us back to the Father.

When we throw ourselves on Jesus and cling to Him for life, He speaks four simple words, 'Your sins are forgiven,' and we're home with God in an instant. We're able to return to God because God wants us there. It is His will that gets us home to Him, not our own.

*"Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave them the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"*  
(John 1:12, 13 NIV).

Likewise, when we cling to Jesus, we cling to the only Person who is able to work His way across the current of self-centeredness and rebellion and not be pulled under. The Bible tells us that Jesus was the only Person who never sinned. He lived 33 years in the raging current of self-centeredness and rebellion and never once lost His footing. Jesus is the only Person strong enough to carry us safely across that current back to God the Father.

There is one other reason that Jesus is the only way home to the Father. Jesus actually *is* the Father – the Father came to get us.

In the same chapter that Jesus said He was the way to the Father, He went on to say that He and the Father were one and the same. Colossians 1:15 puts it this way, "He is the image of the invisible God ... "

The only hope for the child in the story was the hope that his father would come to get him. The only hope for you and me in the middle of our

sin and rebellion is the hope that our Father would come to get us. And He did.

Remember the story we read yesterday? *“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him,”* (Luke 15:20). While we were still a long way off from God the Father, while we were still lost in the distant land of self-centeredness, He stepped into His human disguise and came to get us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The only way home to the Father is Jesus, because Jesus *is* God the Son, sent by God the Father to come to get us.

One last thing. When the father in the story jumped into the river to save his child, He got covered with water. When Jesus jumped into the current of our sin to save us, He got covered with sin. He never sinned, but He had to get covered with our sin in order to save us. The result of Jesus jumping into our sin to save us was His death on the cross. We may never understand all that took place on the cross, but we can know that the cross was necessary for Jesus to get us safely home to God.

*Someone at Young Life camp showed you the way home to the Father. And the way was Jesus Christ.*

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY**

1. You've begun your journey with Jesus. This doesn't mean you've decided to spend the rest of your life trying to follow a trail of 10 commandments. It does mean you've decided you can't get to God on your own – you need Jesus.
  - In your own words, what does it mean to “cling to Christ”?
2. You've been home from camp for a couple of days now. You've probably already begun to feel the tug of the current of self-centeredness and rebellion in your life. This is normal. Clinging to Jesus doesn't mean you don't feel the tug of the current. It does mean you have to have someone who is able to get you across the current to safety.
  - Are there any particular “currents” (old habits, relationships, and more) that are giving you trouble already? If so, what are they?

- Can you think of any practical things you can do to avoid these “currents” in your life?
  
- Can you think of any practical things you can do to cling more tightly to Jesus in the face of these currents?

*Father,*

*I can hardly believe You've come to get me. God came after me? Unbelievable. Incredible. Thank you, Father, for caring so much for me You wouldn't stop searching until You found me.*

*You came to Earth.*

*You went to the cross.*

*You went to Young Life camp.*

*And finally You found me.*

*I'd just like to take a minute to tell You how great I think You are ...*

*Father, I do feel the tug of sin and rebellion in my life. Part of me wants to fall back into old habits; part of me wants to jump right back into some relationships that aren't so good for me. I'm really going to need your help, especially with these particular “currents” ...*

*I love you, Father. Thanks for loving me. Amen.*

# DAY THREE AT HOME

## From the Bible

*“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.” On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you” (John 14:16-20).*

## A Homecoming Gift for You ...

When I was in elementary school and would go to Scout camp in the summer, the day I came home from my two-week adventure was always designated as *my* day. Mom would fix my favorite food for dinner, we would watch my favorite shows on television, and maybe, just maybe, there would be a homecoming gift for me – a new four-square ball or a pair of new tennis shoes.

When you came home from Young Life camp, there may or may not have been a homecoming celebration. You weren't gone long, after all, plus you're older now and might think such a celebration unnecessary. If you had been gone for a few *years*, however, and if your parents had not known you were *ever* coming home, then I hope there would have been *some kind of celebration* the day you finally walked through that door.

The day you walked through God the Father's front door, the day you came home to Him, there was *some kind of celebration*. The story Jesus told in Luke 15 that we read on Day One gives us a glimpse of the party God gave the day you came home to Him. He ran to greet you while you were still some distance off, showered you with gifts, and prepared a feast for the whole household. Jesus said in that same chapter that even the angels in heaven joined in on your homecoming celebration.

What were some of the homecoming gifts that God showered on you? Love, joy, eternal life, plans for your future, a place of honor in His family, power to live life in a great way, unending family privileges, intimacy with the God of all creation, to name a few. This heap of precious gifts, however, was uniquely wrapped in one compact package, a package that was unwrapped in your heart, in the center of your being, the day you came home to God. Just as the way home to the Father was a Person, Jesus, the homecoming package God gave you was a Person as well, the Holy Spirit, God in You.

God has three ways of expressing Himself. He is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. You might think of Him as God above us (the Father,) God with us (Jesus), and God in us (the Holy Spirit). He is all

three at the same time, has always been all three, and will always be all three. We may not understand this divine ability to be three Persons in one, but we probably don't understand a lot of things that we take full advantage of every day.

I don't understand television, microwaves, geometry, soda machines, the central nervous system, or water. But my ignorance doesn't stop me from watching the latest miniseries while eating a bag of microwave popcorn in a chair designed with geometric principles while I drink my soda and think about going swimming this weekend.

We don't have to understand God to relate to Him. We need only to trust Him. We trust Him as the Father we came home to; we trust Him as the Son who carried us home; and now we can trust Him as the Holy Spirit who has been unwrapped in our very being.

God Himself has come to live within you. Think of the implications. You'll never be alone again. You have the most attractive personality ever to walk the Earth living in your body. You don't have to try and force your prayers through the ceiling to reach God, He is listening from within your heart. You have the God who created the mountains, the oceans and the stars ready to exert His creative power through you daily. You don't have to spend your life trying to live like Jesus; you can let Jesus begin to live His life through you. You can have the original Christian life, not just a cheap imitation. God Himself has come to live within you in the Person of the Holy Spirit, and now the rest of your life will be a never-ending process of unwrapping this most unique and precious homecoming gift.

*The day you came home to God the Father was designated as your day. And so is today, and tomorrow, and the next day for all eternity. The Father has thrown a party and given you a homecoming gift that keeps on giving, every day. The gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of God in you.*

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY**

1. A friend in college, after beginning a relationship with the Lord, remarked that suddenly he didn't feel alone anymore. He could be in his dorm room all by himself, but he had a companion.
  - How would you explain this experience?

2. What signs of God's presence in your life have you noticed since you've been home? Check any of the following that you feel you've experienced already in your journey:
- \_\_\_ a sense of companionship with God.
  - \_\_\_ a lack of conflict inside yourself; a sense of peace.
  - \_\_\_ a sense of internal discomfort when you do or say something you know you shouldn't.
  - \_\_\_ a desire to read the Bible or learn more about God.
  - \_\_\_ a desire to talk with God.
  - \_\_\_ a desire to be with other people who love God.

*Lord,*

*The news seems to get better every day. You welcomed me home, even ran to greet me, and now You've given me this intimate homecoming gift — You within me.*

*Thank You, Father, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for the difference Your presence is already making in my life. I'd like to thank You in particular for ...*

*Father, there's a difficult situation I'm facing. Thank You that You will be with me— within me — in this situation ...*

*Father, it appears I've come home to a very close-knit family. Jesus is in You; You are in Jesus; I am in both of You; and You both are in me through the Holy Spirit. Intimacy like this is hard to comprehend.*

*I love You, Father. And I love my new, close-knit family. Thank You that I need only look as far as my own heart to find You — listening, loving and living in me. Amen.*

# DAY FOUR AT HOME

## From the Bible

*"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:12, 13).*

## Conversation with the Father: Listening ...

God Himself has come to live within you. One of the incredible implications of this new living arrangement is the fact that you can now have a personal, one-on-one conversation with the Father at any time during the day.

The Bible has a word for "conversation with God": prayer. You may think of prayer as a memorized poem you recite at bedtime or a lengthy recitation full of thees, thous, arts and amens that people repeat every Sunday at church. Those may be examples of prayers, but prayer is much more than that.

Prayer is an on-going conversation between you and God. It began when you came home to Him, and really never ends. The conversation may take a variety of shapes throughout the day. It may be a lengthy chat in the morning; a simple thought in the afternoon; a sigh of thanks over dinner. Or it may be just a general impression you have on your insides that you can't seem to put into words. Whatever its shape, once you've begun a conversation with God, the communication never ends.

Although prayer may seem a foreign and unnatural concept to you, you probably engage in dozens of conversations every day. The elements that make for good conversation make for good prayer as well. The elements? Speaking and listening.

Tomorrow we'll examine what it means to speak with God. Today let's look at what it means to listen.

First, let's acknowledge a basic problem we encounter when we try to listen to God; His voice is inaudible – we can't hear it with our ears. How *do* we hear God's voice, then? We hear it with two other parts – our hearts and our minds.

When the Bible talks about a person's heart it is usually referring to the will at the center of a person. Your heart is the part of you that says, "Yes, I *will* do this," or "No, I *will not* do that." When God speaks to your heart, He nudges it in one direction or another. He tries to "sway" your will.

For example, let's say a friend asks you to lie to a teacher on his behalf. Ordinarily, this request would not bother you. Now that you've come home to God, however, the simple suggestion of lying makes you feel uncomfortable. Now you can hear God's voice from within your heart nudging you to answer, "No, I will not do that."

We hear God with our hearts, but we hear Him with our minds as well. Our thoughts are the rudder God uses to direct the daily course of our lives. They are likewise the building blocks God uses to construct our character. You may have seen a sign in the cafeteria that says, “You are what you eat.” God’s version of that sign says, “You are what you think,” (Proverbs 23:7).

Right away you may be thinking, “There are a lot of thoughts that pass through my mind each day that I’m certain are not from God.” And you’re absolutely right. God is not the only one who speaks to us in our thoughts. Our spiritual enemy, Satan, and all his destructive forces can influence our thoughts as well. The question is, then, how do we begin to *tune in* to God’s voice and *tune out* everything else? God has given us a unique tool to amplify His voice in our thoughts. He has given us His own thoughts written down on paper. He has given us the Bible.

We need to read the Bible every day. Reading God’s thoughts should be a natural part of ongoing conversation with Him. As we read the Bible, there are some basic questions we can ask that will give us insight into virtually any verse:

- In this verse, what is God ...
- ... revealing to me about Himself?
- ... revealing to me about myself?
- ... asking me to do for Him?
- ... promising to do for me?

This obviously is not an all-inclusive list of questions for studying Scripture, but it is a beginning for learning to listen. The more we read God’s thoughts, the more we study them and even memorize them, the more we will hear God speaking to us in our thoughts. We will be fine-tuning His voice and tuning out others in the process.

In the end, we control the volume of God’s voice in our lives. We control it with our level of obedience. When we do what He asks us to do, we hear Him more clearly the next time He speaks. On the other hand, when we ignore His direction and do our own thing, our hearing is dulled just a bit. The only way to correct our spiritual hearing is to go back to God, admit we were wrong for ignoring His direction, and begin to do whatever He asks in the future.

You have the distinct privilege of engaging in an ongoing, personal conversation with the God of the universe. With every privilege, however, comes a responsibility. Your responsibility in prayer is to listen to God speak within both your heart and your mind, and to respond to His voice with affirmative action. Obedient listening is the first step toward meaningful conversation with God.

# QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Have you heard God speak to you since you've been home? Explain the situation and how you responded.

The Bible is the book of God's thoughts. You need to learn how to find your way around in this book. It takes time, but let's go ahead and begin now.

Find a Bible.

Look near the front of the book for the table of contents.

Find the book named Matthew. In that book find chapter 6, verses 5 and 6. (Note: Chapter numbers will be in large, bold print; verses will be in smaller print within the text.)

Read the verse.

2. What is God ...  
... revealing to you about Himself?

... revealing to me about myself?

... asking you to do for Him?

... promising to do for you?

*Congratulations!* You have just done a personal Bible study on Matthew 6:5-6. This is a small but very significant first step toward a life of personal Bible study.

Here's a challenge for you: Take another step toward good conversation with God and memorize verse 6.

Check here when you've got it memorized\_\_\_\_\_.

*Father,*

*It's so good to hear Your voice. It reassures me that You really have come to live within me. Thank You for these things You've already begun to tell me:*

*Father, there have been a couple of times already when I have heard Your voice, felt Your nudge, and ignored it to do my own thing. I was wrong, Father. Forgive me now and help me to start over again. Give me the courage to do whatever You ask. Here is a specific example where I need Your help.*

*You must really love me a lot, Father, to give me the privilege of talking directly with You. I love You, too.*

# DAY FIVE AT HOME

## From the Bible

Now that you've made your first step toward a life of personal Bible study, each day's journal entry will begin with a Bible reference – that is, the name of a book in the Bible with the number of the chapter and verses behind it. It will be up to you to have a Bible in hand and to find the verse listed.

Remember, use the table of contents! If you get stuck at any point and can't find a verse, call your Young Life leader. There's nothing he or she would rather do than help you read your Bible.

## Today's Bible reference:

**Psalm 139:4, 17, 18**

## Conversation with the Father: Speaking ...

Listen to God. Listen closely, and in no time you will hear Him say, "Talk to Me. Tell Me everything. I love to hear your voice." The Father is our eager audience. In the book of the Bible called Psalms (pronounced salms), chapter 139, we get the idea that God is our doting Father, waiting beside our bed each morning for us to awaken and speak. Once we do awaken, He knows what we're going to say before even the first word rolls off our tongue. That's how in tune and attentive God is to our thoughts and needs.

Though the Father is a perfectly attentive audience, He is a perfectly *invisible* audience as well. Since we often have trouble concentrating in conversations where we can see the person we're talking with, speaking with our invisible Father presents an unusually unique challenge. That's why many people choose to close their eyes when they talk to God. It helps them avoid visual distractions. Some people choose to write their conversations with the Father much like writing a letter to a friend. We need to do whatever we can to help ourselves concentrate while we talk with our Father. He is a perfect audience, but we need help communicating from our end.

What do we say when we talk with the Father? Is there a divine formula we're supposed to follow in prayer? Are we required to use words like thee, thou, praise, art and amen? Are there any topics that are off-limits in our conversation? After all, we don't want to offend God!

What do we say to God? We say anything and everything. He is our loving Father. We can't shock Him. He can deal with anything we can dish out, as long as we are *honest*.

The book of Psalms is a book of prayers to God. You might be surprised at some of the conversations the Psalmist had with the Father. Some of the Psalms devote the entire conversation to telling God how good He is. Others, however, sound like one long gripe session.

Still others ask God to set up a torture chamber of sorts and deal out punishment to the Psalmist's enemies; *"Break the teeth in their mouths, O God,"* and *"Let them vanish ... like a slug melting away ..."* (Psalm 58:6-8). As diverse as the prayers in the psalms are, they each have one common denominator: honesty. Each Psalm is an honest expression of a person's heart and mind before God.

In honest prayer, you give all you know of yourself to all you know of God. And yourself is one gift the Father will never refuse, no matter how attractive or atrocious you might be at any given moment. He died to receive the gift called you. Don't deny Him that gift by giving Him some spruced-up substitute you think He might like better.

Finally, is there a divine formula we're supposed to follow in prayer? Are we supposed to sound like a character from a Shakespearean play? What language does God speak, anyway?

God speaks the language of the heart. In prayer we need to use whatever words, whatever phrases, whatever period that helps us communicate most honestly and most completely what is on our heart and mind. As for a divine formula, there is none. When we pray, we are speaking with a Person, not a computer or an automatic bank teller. We don't simply punch in the secret code and wait for our answer to pop out in an instant. There are tools, however, that people sometimes use to help them organize their conversations with the Father. We will look at one of those tools tomorrow.

Listen to God, and in no time you will hear Him say, "Talk to Me. Tell Me everything. I love to hear your voice." The Father is your eager audience, ready to accept with open arms whatever you've got to give Him in prayer, as long as whatever you've got to give Him is honestly and completely you.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. When have you found it easiest to talk to God?
  - What were some of the factors that made it easier for you to talk with God at that time?
2. What practical steps can you take in the future to make it easier for you to talk to God?

- Is there anything on your heart or mind that you think would shock God if you talked with Him about it?

God knew everything about you when He chose to die on the cross for you. And He didn't die from shock; He died from love. You can tell Him anything. His understanding and forgiveness are big enough to take it.

*Father,*

*It's good to know there is nothing I can say that will shock You. After all, You did walk around for 33 years as a human being Yourself. You've seen this life from the inside out, and now You're seeing it again from within me.*

*Here's how I'm feeling today, Father. I'm feeling really glad about ...*

*At the same time, I'm feeling discouraged about ...*

*Lord, here are some other things that are going on inside of me that I'd like to tell You about ...*

*Father, I give You everything I know about myself today — the good, the bad, the ugly. Thank You that you accept it all, that You celebrate the good, forgive the bad and transform the ugly.*

*It's really good to talk to You. Amen.*

# DAY SIX

## The Art of Talking with God ...

### From the Bible

Read Matthew 6:9-13

Jim has his first date with Janeen tonight. As he mows the lawn this afternoon, he is imagining his conversation with Janeen over dinner. First, he'll tell her how nice she looks. Next he'll ask her what she did today. This should lead naturally to what he did today, to his summer lawn-mowing service and to the car of his dreams he is saving to buy. Meanwhile, Janeen is home, cleaning her room, making her own plans for a smooth first conversation with Jim.

We've all done it. We've preplanned a conversation to avoid tripping over our tongue in embarrassment. Preplanning a conversation is just one of many tools we can use to help us brave those awkward first conversations with people we'd really like to impress. As we grow to know the other person, however, the need for tools diminishes, and conversation becomes as natural and rhythmic as breathing.

Don't be surprised if you find yourself tripping over your tongue the first few times you try talking with God in prayer. Grown men who talked face to face with Jesus every day had the same problem. They finally asked one day, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" (Luke 11:1). Jesus responded by giving the men a tool to guide their conversations with the Father. We call it the "The Lord's Prayer." It's the prayer you read from the Bible today.

You may have heard this prayer before at church, in a wedding, at a funeral, or some other formal event. Jesus did not mean for this prayer to become the only prayer we ever utter to God. He spoke many other prayers Himself that sounded nothing like the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. But The Lord's Prayer can serve as a conversational *tool*, as a pattern to help us organize our thoughts before the Father.

With that in mind, what pattern do we find in this prayer? Can we draw something simple and easy from it to guide us in our prayers? You might say that, in The Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us the art of talking with God, that is, the ART of talking to God:

**A** – Acknowledge God.

**R** – Reveal yourself and Request help.

**T** – Thank Him for everything.

**Acknowledge God.** Simply put, declare who it is you are talking with. Jesus began His model prayer with the words, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*" As we begin to consider who God is, something begins to

happen to our heart, to our will. It begins to give way to God's heart, to His will.

Jesus said, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" As we begin to realize how perfectly wise and loving God is, we begin to want life to go the way He wants it to. "*Your will be done,*" is the attitude that melts our hearts as we begin to acknowledge who it is we are talking with in prayer.

Some other A words that would fit under acknowledging God are: admire Him; appreciate Him; address Him; applaud Him; adore Him. God likes to hear good things about Himself as much as the next person. Furthermore, we need to hear good things about God. Only as we begin to discover who God is are we in a good position to discover who we are – which brings us to the next letter ...

**Reveal yourself and Request His help.** These two statements go hand-in-hand. As we begin to tell God who we really are, we begin to see our need for His help in every area. For example, we might say, "Lord, I'm really tired today," which leads naturally to, "Please give me Your strength." We might say, "I'm confused about what to do in this situation," which leads naturally to, "Lord, give me direction and wisdom."

In The Lord's Prayer, Jesus revealed who we were and made His requests with the same statement. "Give us today our daily bread." This reveals that we are people who are dependent on God for our physical needs and presents those needs to God simultaneously. "Forgive us our debts," reveals that we are people who need forgiveness and, at the same time, requests that forgiveness from the Father. Now that we've revealed ourselves and requested God's help, it's time to ...

**Thank God for everything.** Nowhere in the model prayer did Jesus say, "Thank you, Father." He did, however, end the prayer by acknowledging that everything belongs to the Father: "*For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever,*" (Matthew 6:13 NAS). A thankful attitude recognizes that everything belongs to God. Whatever we have or enjoy is a gift from the One who owns everything. The best way to develop a thankful attitude is to practice saying thank you to the Father.

The ART of prayer is just a tool – not a rule. It's a tool to help us get started in our conversations with the Father, not a rule to limit us in those conversations. We need to depend first and foremost on the internal leading of the Holy Spirit in prayer, not on the external structure of a tool. As we talk with the Father daily, we need to echo the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." Then, like the disciples, we will be privileged to learn firsthand from the Lord the art of talking with God.

# QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. When you were a small child, did you have any prayers that you recited regularly – at bedtime or meals? Try to remember the words.
  - How has your concept of prayer changed since then?

Another tool that can help us pray is a prayer list. Some people like to make a list of everyone and everything they want to talk with God about, and then divide that list into seven days a week. If you would like to try using a list, below is an outline to help you get started.

<b>Immediate Family</b>	<b>My Physical Needs</b>
<b>Distant Family</b>	<b>My Spiritual Needs</b>
<b>Friends</b>	<b>My Heart's Desires</b>
<b>People Who Don't Know Jesus Yet</b>	<b>Other Things on My Heart and Mind</b>
<b>Leaders</b> Church leaders Young Life leaders Government leaders School administrators Teachers	<b>Things to Thank God For</b>

After you've filled out your list, go back to each item and write in front of it either SU, M, TU, W, TH, F, or SA, depending on which day you plan to pray for that item. You will have four or five items to pray for each day. You may want to note in the margins how God answers specific prayers, as well.

*Father,*

*First, I'd like to spend some time acknowledging who You are and how great I think You are ...*

*Next, I'd like to reveal some things about myself and request Your help in each area. Lord, here are some of the desires of my heart ...*

*Please grant these desires if they are what's best for me. If they are not, then please begin to change my desires. I want life to go the way You want it to go.*

*I need to reveal to You, Father, the areas where I've messed up lately and request Your forgiveness. Please forgive me for ...*

*As I reveal who I am, Father, I realize I am part of several groups – my family, my friends, my country, to name a few. As a member of these groups, I request You help them in these ways ...*

*Thank You, Father, for all Your good gifts to me. Thanks in particular for ...*

*Most of all, thanks for listening.*

# DAY SEVEN

## Belonging to the Family of God ...

### From the Bible

Read Acts 2:44-47

What's your biggest fear? Fear of the future? Fear of death? Fear of failing chemistry? A few years ago, students at a large Texas high school answered that question on a survey. Their overwhelming response: fear of being alone.

Alone. The word itself sounds cold and empty. Alone. We're not talking about the occasional daily breaks where you have a few moments to yourself. Those can be fun, refreshing and needed. We're talking about being a-l-o-n-e.

Alone is something you can be in a crowd. Alone is something you can be even if you're the most popular student in school. Alone is something God said from the beginning it was not good for man to be. "*It is not good for the man to be alone,*" (Genesis 2:18).

What does it mean to be alone? It means to be the only one. The only one who has ever felt this pain. The only one who has ever thought these thoughts. The only one who has ever questioned God. The only one who has ever had these urges, made these mistakes, had these regrets.

You could be alone in the midst of the good things in life as well. You can be the only one to have this hope. The only one to feel this joy. The only one to trust in God. The only one to dream these dreams. You could be – but you're not.

You see, *alone* is something you will never be again. When you came home to God, you checked *alone* at the front door like a tattered old coat, never to be reclaimed, and slipped into *belonging* like a new warm robe that will only grow more comfortable with age.

If *being alone* were a disease, then *belonging* would be the cure. Now that you're at home with the Father, not only do you belong to Him, not only does His coming to live within you make it impossible for you to ever be alone again, but now you belong to His family as well. Now you belong to the group of people the Father fondly calls "His children," your brothers and sisters in Christ. Any person who has ever come home to the Father has been born into the family of God.

This is great news. You have brothers and sisters you've never met. So where do you find this "family of God?" How do you connect with your new brothers and sisters in Christ? Is there some way you can recognize them when you see them?

The family of God is spread throughout the world. You have brothers and sisters on every continent, in every country, that speak every language and wear every color of skin. With so much diversity in the family, how can

you recognize the members?

Every child of God bears the same identifying birthmark: faith in Jesus Christ. Every child of God has thrown himself onto Jesus Christ and has been carried home to God the Father. Every child of God has clung to Jesus as *the only One* who can get him home to God.

Now that we know what family trait to look for, how do we connect with our new brothers and sisters? Do we build a website or post on social media that we're looking for our new family?

There is a network for finding them, and it's closer than you think; it's called "the local church." Walk in the doors of any local church where people have faith in Jesus Christ and you'll find yourself walking into a family reunion – *your* family reunion. Your new family gets together for visits regularly, and you need to begin to join them. You *belong* with them.

You'll begin to discover something as you meet regularly with your new family. You'll discover that you're not the only one.

You're not the only one who has felt this pain. You're not the only one who has questioned God. You're not the only one who has had these urges, made these mistakes, and had these regrets. You'll find you're not the only one who has this hope, feels this joy, trusts in God, dreams these dreams.

What will you discover as you begin to meet with your new family? You'll discover the cure for the disease called being alone. And the cure is belonging – *belonging to the family of God*.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Before you came to God, how would you have defined church?
  - How would you define church today?
2. Can you think of any practical reasons why we, as members of God's family, need to meet together regularly?

## Here's a challenge for you:

*If you already attend a church regularly:*

Within the next week, talk to your pastor or youth leader and tell them about your new relationship with God. Ask them to help you grow in your new relationship.

*If you do not attend church regularly:*

Begin visiting churches this week. You can usually find addresses and meeting times online. Look for these things in a church:

- Belief that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.
- A form of worship that you feel comfortable with.
- A program for people your age that includes times of study in the Bible as well as times just to have fun.

Always remember, if you need help or have questions, call your Young Life leaders!

By the way – you're welcome to go to church with them!

*Father,*

*You knew from the beginning that it wasn't good for people to be alone. Thanks to You, I will never be completely alone again. You've come to live with me, and I've returned to a home full of brothers and sisters ... home where I belong.*

*Help me, Father, to get actively involved with my new family. They need me, and I need them. And, of course, we all need You. That's what makes us a family.*

*Father, I can talk with You like this because of Your Son, and my Brother, Jesus. Amen.*

# DAY EIGHT

## The Journey That Leads to Love

### From the Bible

Read Matthew 22:34-40 (memorize verse 37)

You've begun a journey with Jesus. The word *journey* implies a couple of things. First, you're going somewhere. Second, there's a process involved in getting there.

Where are you going in your journey with Jesus? What is His goal for you? What does God want from us, anyway?

A lawyer once asked Jesus, "Which commandment is most important?" In other words, "What does God want from us anyway?" Jesus had a remarkable comeback. He said, in effect, "I want you to love me." The God of the universe who created mankind with a word stood before the very people He had fashioned from the dirt and said, "I want you to love me." God opened the treasure chest of His heart and pulled out one desire to hang around our neck, "I want you to love me."

What is the greatest commandment? God could have responded with a clenched fist in the air and a fiery shout, "Do what I say or die!" He could have required every man and woman to give up eating twice a week, give half their money to the church, shave their heads, and never enjoy walking in the park again. He could have required *anything* of us. After all, He *is* God. This *is* His ball game. But because of the *kind* of God He is, He laid one commandment on the table: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

You've begun a journey with Jesus, a journey of learning to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. *Not* a journey of learning to be good. *Not* a journey of learning to be strong. *Not* a journey of learning to be like God. *A journey of learning to love God.* It may well follow that you become good, strong and like God in the process of loving Him, but those are not your goals. Your goal is to love God.

Now that you know where you're going on this journey, what's the process that's involved? How do we go about "learning to love God?"

We've already discussed several parts of the learning process in the first seven days of this journal. We talk with God and listen. We get actively involved with our new family, the church. But there is one basic, irreplaceable first step in the process of learning to love God – the step we're going to linger on for the next few days – *learning to let God love you.*

The book of the Bible called 1 John tells us that we love because God first loved us. Any love that spills out of our heart is an overflow of the love that God has poured into it. If we are to love God, or anyone else, it will be because we first allowed God to love us.

What does God want from you? One thing: Your whole-hearted love.

How can you begin to give it to Him? The inescapable first step in the journey of learning to love God is learning to let God love you.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. If you were to survey your school with the question, "What does God expect from His followers?" how do you predict they would answer?
  
2. In the past two weeks, what has helped you most believe and experience God's personal love for you?

Though the intensity of God's love for us never changes, our awareness of His love may fluctuate from time to time. Recall often the incidents in your life that have helped you experience God's love.

*Loving Lord,*

*It's sometimes difficult to believe You love me. "You are loved," is not the main message we pick up from the world today. Instead we hear loud and clear, "You're ugly; you're worthless; you're boring; you're nothing." But, at camp, I did hear You say from inside my own heart, "I love you." Now I can hear it again, the quiet voice of my Father from within.*

*Lord, help me linger in this love. Let its gentle, quiet current swell into a rushing, roaring river that spills easily out of my heart onto anyone I might bump up against today ... beginning now with You. I love You, God. Amen.*

# DAY NINE

## God Loves Us Because of Who We Are ...

### From the Bible

Psalm 139:13, 14 and 1 John 3:1

There's an old quilt in our closet that looks like it should've been ditched several years ago. It's yellowed and tattered. But it's one piece of fabric that will never be ditched, regardless of how yellowed or tattered it becomes. On the other hand, we've sold several new, colorful blankets at garage sales for less than the price of a small pizza. What's the difference? The quilt was handmade by my grandmother; the blankets were factory-stitched.

That musty old quilt is priceless because it's held together by threads of love. My grandmother gave me a part of herself when she gave me that handmade quilt. In fact, *anytime anyone creates anything*, they weave themselves into the finished product.

God was very busy the months before you were born, weaving you together in your mother's womb. And what raw materials did He use? Not just amino acids and DNA. God wove bits of Himself into the very fabric of your life. He took the threads of His own hopes and dreams and wove them together into the person called *you*.

God loves you because of who you are, a delicate piece of fabric lovingly stitched together with the threads of His heart's desires. Regardless of how faded and ragged your life might become, He will never be willing to cast it aside.

God is never willing to cast any of us aside, "*The Lord is ... patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish ...*" (2 Peter 3:9). Yet He has given us each a free will, and each of us has used our free will to walk away from Him. We've each cut the threads that connected us to the Father and handed the fabric of our lives over to our Father's worst enemy, Satan, only to see our lives unraveled little by little, day by day. Eventually we've become little more than a faded, tattered rag, not worth even a few cents at a garage sale, at least, not to the untrained eye. But the Father's eye could spot His own creation from worlds away. He's dug us out from a pile of rags and said, "I'll take this one." Then He has proceeded to pay, not just a few cents, but the blood of His own Son to reclaim us.

God loves because of who we are, His faded, tattered creation purchased with the priceless life of His only Son. Because God loves us, He will not leave us in our unraveled state. He still has plenty of raw materials, plenty of bits of Himself, to reweave us with, as long as we keep placing ourselves in His creative hands.

*"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* (1 John 3:1a). Children

are physically woven together with the amino acids and DNA from both parents. Children of God are spiritually woven together with the hopes and dreams of their Father’s heart. God loves us because of who we are, His children, created, purchased and recreated by Him.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Picture for a moment the Father weaving you together in your mother’s womb. Picture Him as He works quietly, carefully, lovingly weaving bits of Himself into the fabric of your life.
  - Does this picture alter the way you see or feel about yourself? If so, how?

2. In Galatians 5:19-21, we see a picture of a life completely unraveled by rebellion against God. The picture looks like this:

Sensuality	A Bad Temper
Sexual Immorality	Envy
Drunkenness	Rivalry
Witchcraft	Factions
Worship of False Gods	Orgies
Hatred	Impurity of Mind
Strife	A Party-Spirit
Jealousy	

Do you see any of these characteristics in yourself? If so, they are leftovers from your old life before Christ.

The good news is in Galatians 5:22, 23. Now that you have placed yourself in God’s creative hands, He is weaving His characteristics into you. Circle any that you’ve already begun to notice threading themselves through the fabric of your new life – even if only slightly.

Love	Goodness
Joy	Faithfulness
Peace	Gentleness
Patience	Self-Control
Kindness	

You can look forward to all these characteristics eventually developing in you as God recreates you daily with the threads of Himself.

*Creative God,  
You've got a lot invested in me. The hopes and dreams of Your  
heart ... the flesh and blood of Your Son.*

*Forgive me for not recognizing my infinite worth. No longer will I  
accept the idea that I am worthless, or even just mediocre. That  
would be a stab to Your own heart, a slap to Your Son's face.*

*I open myself up now to accept to a greater depth Your incredible  
love for me.*

*You created me once, Father, and now You're at it again. Thank  
You that this new creation will never unravel. Thank You that the  
"tattered rags" of my old life are gradually slipping away, that  
one day that last rag will drop to the ground, and I will finally  
stand before You clothed only in Your characteristics.*

*Lord, I look forward to that day. Until then, may I keep placing  
the fabric of my life in Your creative hands.*

*Twice yours in Christ — Amen.*

# DAY TEN

## God Loves Us in Spite of What We Do ...

### From the Bible

Read Psalm 103:8-14 and Luke 23:33, 34

Our 2-year-old daughter wrote on our living room wall today with a blue permanent marker. That was the last straw. We immediately packed her Raggedy Ann suitcase and threw her out on the street to live the rest of her life as an ex-member of our family. That wasn't her first offense, after all. She had written on the bedroom wall a few months before, and the kitchen wall last week. We forgave her the first two times, but *three times for the same offense*? We're not *that* gullible. So out on her ear she went.

Don't call the child-abuse hotline just yet. This is obviously a fabricated story. It's ridiculous, almost comical, to imagine such parental intolerance. Yet most of us give God the Father much less credit than we give our human parents. We imagine that He can forgive us the first time we do wrong; He can even forgive us the second time for the same offense. But the third time? He's not that gullible. So out on our ear we go to live the rest of our life as an ex-member of God's family.

You've been home from camp 10 days now. Let's say you've only messed up twice a day since you've been home. You've only ignored God's voice from within to do your own thing two times a day. Even at that incredibly obedient pace, that still makes for 20 times God has had to forgive you since camp. If you're like most people, you're beginning to feel like God has already thrown you out of His family, like He's looked at you and said, "That's the last straw. Out you go."

But God is not like that. He loves us in spite of the wrong things we do. He loves us because of who we are, His children created in His image, purchased with the blood of Jesus, and now in the process of being recreated in His image. God loves us because of who we are, and nothing we can do, right or wrong, can change one inkling who God is.

We love our two-year old daughter because she is our daughter – we are her parents. Because we love her, we forgive her for anything she does wrong. No matter how many times she does it, she still belongs to us.

God loves you because you are His child, He is your Father. Because He loves you, He will forgive you for anything you do wrong, no matter how many times you do it. He would no more throw you out of His family for making a mistake than human parents would throw a young child out onto the streets for writing on the wall. For *"as a father has compassion on His children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him,"* (Psalm 103:13).

When our daughter writes on the wall, breaks a dish, spills her juice, we don't say, "Well, you're no longer a daughter of ours." On the contrary, we say, "She's just a child. She doesn't know what she's doing."

When Jesus hung on the cross while we wrote mocking words above His head, broke His heart and spilled His blood, He didn't say, "Well, you're no longer children of Mine." On the contrary, He said, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,*" (Luke 23:24).

God loves you because of who you are, His child. Better yet, He loves you because of who He is, your Father. And because of who He is, He loves you in spite of what you do. No matter how many times you do it, you still belong to Him.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. You cannot surprise God. That is, you cannot surprise God with your sin. There is nothing you can do that would cause God to say, "Hmmm. I wasn't expecting that. I think I'll reconsider this forgiveness thing."

When Jesus died on the cross, He took a long hard look at every single sin committed by every single person – ever. There wasn't one that escaped His attention. After He had sifted through them all, He asked the Father to forgive us, then He died in our place.

- Is there some sin in your life that you're afraid has caught God by surprise? Maybe you think He's surprised by the number of times you repeat this same sin. Guess again.
- Write a short prayer thanking God for forgiving you for this particular sin ...
- Keep in mind that once God forgives, He forgets. Don't try confessing this particular sin again, because He won't know you're what you're talking about! (Isaiah 43:25)

(Remember, you can take practical steps to avoid the currents of sin that drag you under. See Day Two.)

2. You are completely secure as God's child. Your security is not dependent on your actions – your grip on God. Your security is dependent on God's actions – His grip on you. Jesus said in John 10:28, 29 that "*no one will snatch them (His children) out of my hand.*" He went on to say, "*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one will snatch them out of my Father's hand.*"

- What's the worst thing you think you could do as a human being, the thing you think God could never forgive you for?

God's grip is stronger than the pull of whatever you mentioned. His grip is "greater than all." If He could forgive you for the worst thing you could think of, don't you think He could forgive you for the seemingly lesser things you do each day?

*Forgiving God,*

*You've got a grip on me. The grip of a Father on His child. The grip that will never let me go. Thank You for that kind of security.*

*I belong to You, Father, and nothing I do can change that fact. I am free to fail completely because nothing I can do will cause You to cast me out of Your family. And since I'm free to fail, I'm finally free to succeed. I'm just free — period.*

*Isn't it ironic, Father, that only in Your relentless grip do we find complete freedom?*

*Now, in the complete security of Your loving hand, I give to You the mistakes I've made today. Father, forgive me for ...*

*Thank You, Father, for Your abundant forgiveness. Thank You that nothing and no one can pry me out of Your hand — the hand that was pierced because of my sin, the hand that spilled out only forgiveness in return.*

*I love You.*

*Forever in Your grip ...*

# DAY ELEVEN

## Looking in the Heart of God ...

### From the Bible

Read John 19

You've begun a journey of learning to love God, and the first step in that journey is learning to let God love you. We've been lingering on that step for the past two days. Today we want to take one final look at God's love for you, and to do that we must look at the cross that Jesus died on. The cross is the lens that allows us to look into the very heart of God and see with perfect resolution His relentless love for us.

What do we see when we look into the heart of God? We see that there is only one thing in life God is not willing to let go of. That one thing is you. That one thing is me. The cross is the final proof that we are the only thing God will not let go of.

When Jesus left His Father's side in heaven and stepped into His human disguise as a baby in Bethlehem, He began a long process of letting go of everything in life – everything besides you and me. The first thing He let go of was His side-by-side relationship with His Father. If ever there were a Father and a Son team who loved and enjoyed each other, it was Jesus and His Father in heaven. But Jesus let go of that side-by-side companionship with His Father in order to come to Earth and pursue you and me.

Once Jesus got to Earth, He continued to let go of everything in His pursuit of you and me. He let go of political power, popularity, the pleasures of life on Earth. Jesus once said of Himself, "*I have nowhere even to lay my head,*" (Luke 9:58). He let go of the simplest of life's pleasures.

Jesus let go of all the trinkets life had to offer as well. When He died He owned no stocks and bonds, no condos, no boats, no cattle. In fact, when Jesus died, He didn't even own the clothes off His own back. Some soldiers gambled those last few belongings away in a game.

On the cross, Jesus continued to let go of anything life had to offer Him except you and me. He let go of His right to a fair trial. He let go of His ability to call thousands of angels to rescue Him. He let go of His dignity and pride. People stripped Him naked in front of the crowds, spit on Him and called Him names. But His hands were too full to cling to the likes of dignity and pride. His hands were full of hope – hope of a future with you and me.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross because of the joy set before Him. What was that joy? I believe it was the thought of enjoying a personal relationship with you and me. Jesus let go of everything in life so His hands would be free to cling to that single hope.

It's been well said that it wasn't nails that held Jesus to the cross; it was love. Jesus clung so tightly to His love for us on the cross it left eternal imprints on His hands – scars of love that the Bible says He will carry with Him forever to remind Him of us. Isaiah 49:15,16 says, "... I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands ..."

When Jesus died, God the Father said, "That's enough. The price has been paid in full." As proof that every last sin of every last person had been paid for by Jesus, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus walked the Earth for 40 days following His resurrection, appearing to many eye-witnesses, comforting them that their sins were forgiven and paid for in full. Then He ascended into heaven and returned to His Father's side. There He waits to see if we will choose to spend eternity in a loving relationship with Him.

When we look at the cross Jesus died on, we see directly into the heart of God. What do we find in that heart? We find that there is only one thing in life that God is not willing to let go of. That one thing is you. That one thing is me. The question becomes, then, what is the one thing in life we are not willing to let go of? Is it Him? He is looking into your heart to see.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. We've spent three days now focusing on God's love for us. Imagine for a moment you're trying to explain God's love to a friend.
  - What would you say?

There's a person who needs to hear this message desperately – you. Will you please remind yourself of it daily?

*Lord,  
You let go of everything to grab at a chance of spending eternity with me. And that's all it was — a chance. You weren't guaranteed that I would choose to come back home to You. How could You be so taken with me, Lord?*

*What can I let go of for You, Father? How can I begin to return Your love? Are there some attitudes I can let go of? Some destructive habits? Some relationships that don't please You? Are there some movies I should avoid? Some music I shouldn't listen to? Thoughts I shouldn't indulge in?*

*Show me, Father, where I can begin to let go. Already I can hear You asking me to loosen my grip on these attitudes.*

*I need to let go of these habits, too:*

*Are there talents I have that I should quit clinging to and begin using them for You? What about my money? Even though there's not much of it, I could still let go of some for You. And time — that's a challenge, Lord. We all have the same amount of time allotted to us, but we all act like we have less than someone else! Help me to quit clinging to time like I own it. Even that belongs to You.*

*Lord, here's a particular ability I have that I'd like to give over to You. Please use it in whatever ways You would like.*

*Whatever I let go of, Father, is less than nothing compared to what You let go of for me. I love you, God. Amen.*

# DAY TWELVE

## Loving God: Where Do We Find Him?

### Read the Bible

Read Matthew 25:31-46

When a human heart is touched by the love of the Father, it knows only one response; love Him in return. But *where* do we find God so that we can love Him? And *how* do we go about loving Him when we find Him?

Seven times Jesus pointed to a person and said, in essence, "There I am." In Matthew 25, He pointed to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers, prisoners and said, "*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*" And in Matthew 18:5 Jesus pointed to the little children and said, "*There I am.*" He said, "*And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.*" If we want to find God in order to love Him, we need only find another person in need. And you have only to look as far as your own family to find plenty of needy people.

Who in your family is hungry for attention? Thirsty for compassion? In need of a warm coat of encouragement? Which of your friends is feeling like a stranger today, like no one understands them? Who within your reach is sick at heart about something? Or imprisoned with some guilt from the past or fear of the future? The fact is, probably everyone you come in contact with fits into more than one of these categories. And doesn't each of us have a small child of sorts inside of us that Jesus points to and says, "There I am." If you want to find God so that you can love Him, you need only look at the person sitting next to you.

Now that we have an idea *where* we find God to love Him, *how* do we go about loving God?

Love is a verb. It's an action word. A good definition of loving God is:

*Taking action for the good of others.*

1 John 3:18 says, "*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and with truth.*" **If we really want to love God, we need to take action for the good of someone else.** We need to open that door for our brother whose arms are full; we need to take out the garbage before our mom has to ask; we need to listen to a friend who needs to talk instead of talking all the time about ourselves; we need to take our friends and our dates places that only God would want them to go.

**Our action for the good of others should include people outside of the circle of our family and friends, too.** We need to take time to befriend the new student at school; we need to gather up the clothes we don't wear any more and give them to someone who needs them; we need to give our money to the church so it can be used to help hungry, thirsty, naked and sick people. Each time we take action for the good of another, we need to remember we are loving God in the process.

Last fall I took our 2-year-old daughter to the homecoming assembly at school. As we slipped in the back door of the auditorium, one of the homecoming attendants in her long dress spied our daughter and took off for the principal's office. She returned shortly with a pair of scissors. She proceeded to cut the strings that tied two helium balloons to her homecoming bouquet, then secure them to our daughter's wrist. Our daughter was delighted.

That was nine months ago. Our daughter has long forgotten the attendant's act of kindness, but it's still clear in my mind. What she did for our child, she did for me, and I'll probably never forget it.

We tell our high school friends who come into our house, "If you want to love us, just love our children." God tells you and me the same thing. "If you want to love me, just love my children." What we do for His children, we do for Him. His children may forget, but the Father never will.

1 John 4:19-21 sums up the cycle of love in the Christian's life:

*"We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates his brother or sister is a liar. For anyone who does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."*

Any journey we undertake can be completed only one step at a time. Our journey with Jesus is no different. There are only two steps in this journey that, when repeated again and again, get us where we're going. **Step number one:** Open our hearts daily to be filled with the love of God for us. **Step number two:** Turn around and pour that love onto the thirsty ground in someone else with actions as well as words. When we repeat those steps again and again, like placing one foot in front of the other, we'll find ourselves making great strides in our journey of learning to love God.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Why is it impossible to love God and hate the people around you at the same time?
2. Make a list of three people you come in contact with most often each week. Beside each person list a need he or she has and a specific way you are going to try to help meet that need this week.

Names	Needs	My Action on Their Behalf

3. Check any of the following that are possibilities for you in the near future:

- Giving money to the poor, through church or other organizations.
- Visiting a widow or widower.
- Working at a food kitchen.
- Donating clothing to the Salvation Army or some other mission for the needy.
- Volunteering to work with the young children at church.
- Calling someone who is new in town and asking if there is anything I can do for them.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Father,  
I love You. It looks like the best way I can express that love is by doing something for the good of someone else. So help me now to begin calculating how much good I can do for others.*

*One action I can take for the good of others is to pray for them. Right now I'd like to bring to Your attention these people that I know are hungry for some love and attention ...*

*Please bring people into their lives — including me — who will love them and give them attention.*

*Father, here's the name of someone who needs some encouragement ...*

*Give me an idea, God, of how I can genuinely encourage him or her with words and actions.*

*Lord, I am one of the needy people too. I need these things from You ...*

*Thank You that You provide all my needs — and it's usually through other people.*

*Lord, don't let me forget the truly hungry, the truly sick, the truly naked. Show me practical steps I can take to ease their pain — today.*

*Open my eyes, Lord. Let me see Jesus. Remind me to look for Him where He is most likely to be found — waiting within the needy, demanding people all around me. Waiting for a loving touch from me.*

# DAY THIRTEEN

## Show and Tell in That Order ...

### Read the Bible

Read 1 Peter 3:15

As you begin to take action for the good of others, as you begin to find ways to love God by loving the people around you, the people around you may begin to ask questions ... *Exactly what's gotten into this person? He's never treated me this way before.* Eventually their curiosity may get the best of them, and they may corner you with their questions. When that time comes, how will you reply?

1 Peter 3:15 tells us we need to be prepared for just such an occasion. And when the time comes, we need to answer the questions that come our way with gentleness and respect. But before we discuss what we ought to say, let's acknowledge the sequence of events implied in 1 Peter 3:15. First, someone notices a difference in our lives. Next, they ask us to explain the difference. Last, we explain our faith in Christ with gentleness and respect. In other words, we show and *then* tell our faith, in that order.

Why is it important to show our faith in Christ before we tell about it? For starters, if people see a change in our lives before they hear about it, they are more likely to believe what we say when we finally say it. Furthermore, if we actively love people before we tell them about Christ, it serves as a motivation check.

If all we want to do is tell people about Jesus without having to expend any energy actively loving them first, then we need to ask ourselves *why* we want to tell them about Jesus. It might be that we want to appear to have all the answers, to appear powerful in our new knowledge of God. If we take the time and pains to actively love people *before* we tell them about Jesus, however, then it's more likely our motives for telling will be pure. It's more likely we will be telling them about Jesus as a continuation of our love for them.

When the time comes to explain to another person the difference he or she sees in our lives, what do we say? Do we pull out a Bible and read them a few chapters? Do we give them a summary of the week of talks we heard at Young Life camp? One thing is certain, if we do either of the above, we probably won't have to answer any more questions about our faith from *that* person. They'll be afraid to ask.

If someone asks you to explain your faith, the best advice is to keep your explanation short, sweet and hard to beat. And don't reach for your Bible right away. First, tell them about your personal experience. For example, you might respond, "You're right, Grant, I am different. I've begun a personal relationship with God, and He's changing my life."

If Grant is still curious, if he says, "What do you mean?" Or even if he

just looks at you with a big question mark on his face, you might continue with something like this: "What I mean is this: I've trusted the controls of my life to Jesus Christ. I'm learning to love God and to let God love me."

People can't argue your personal experience. The best first answer to offer someone for the "hope that is in you" is to simply and clearly explain your personal experience with the Lord. If they are still curious or open to listening after hearing your personal experience, then you can gently explain to them the basic points of your faith. You have come to believe that:

1. God created us in His image to enjoy life with Him (Genesis 1:27; John 10:10).
2. Each of us has turned his or her back on God. We have chosen to live life with ourselves at the center rather than with God at the center of our lives. We have "sinned" (Romans 3:23).
3. The wages of sin is death – eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23).
4. Jesus died in our place (Romans 5:8). The price for our sin has been paid in full.
5. We can be joined back in right relationship with God by accepting the death of Christ on our behalf and trusting Him with the controls of our life (John 3:16; Romans 10:9).

If the opportunity comes up to explain these details of your faith, you might want to have this journal on hand just to help you remember the facts and find the verses.

Look for opportunities to tell others about Jesus, but don't force your faith on others. If someone asks, relate your personal experience with gentleness and respect. If the person is still curious, present the simple points of your faith as outlined above. If you sense he or she is becoming defensive as you speak, it might be best to discreetly change the subject. The person may need more proof of your faith in your actions before he or she is ready to hear any more of your explanation.

There may be times when no one directly *asks* you to explain your faith, but you sense a curiosity or an openness to listening. If you sense God nudging you to speak (remember, listen from within!), You might begin with something like this, "Caroline, something really significant has happened in my life recently. Could I tell you a little about it?" If your friend is willing to listen again, start with your personal experience. If she is still interested, you might say, "Could I briefly tell you what I've come to believe?" If she is still willing to listen, you can relate to her the points of your faith as outlined above. When you've finished your discussion, remember to thank the person for taking time to listen.

Telling others about Jesus is not a task that should be trusted to human instinct. We need to rely closely on the leading of God from within us as we try explaining our faith to others. Only He can perfectly direct us

when to speak, what to say, and when to be quiet. And He promises that He will do just that if we will listen.

Explaining the hope that is within us to others is essential if we are to grow in our relationship with Christ. And sharing our faith with others is as simple as show and tell. First we *show* them that we love them, then we *tell* them why.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. When Christians talk about sharing their personal experience with Jesus Christ, they sometimes call what they share a “testimony.” Below is an outline for a short, sweet and hard to beat testimony. Fill in the blanks with your personal experience, then keep this testimony mentally on-hand to share when God presents the opportunity.
  - Give us two sentences that describe your life before you met Christ ...
  - How did you meet Jesus? (Briefly, when, where, how ... think back to your first journal entry.)
  - In two or three sentences, what has been different about your life since you met Christ?

*Lord,*

*When I think of telling others who don't know You about my new faith, I get butterflies in my stomach. What should I say? What if they don't understand? And worse yet, what if they reject me — what if they never want to come near me again because they're afraid I might talk about You?*

*Father, here are my personal fears about sharing my faith ...*

*Thank You, Father, that You anticipated my fears. Thank You that You strategically placed the Holy Spirit in me to guide me, strengthen me, to tell me when to speak and what to say. Today I will begin anew to try and listen carefully with my heart and my mind for Your leading.*

*Father, I know some people who need to hear about You. Please provide opportunities for me to speak with these people ...*

*In the name of the Jesus, the One they need to know ... Amen.*

# DAY FOURTEEN

## An Enemy Along the Path

### From the Bible

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11 and 1 Peter 5:8

Childhood is a magical time of life. Most people carry a few memories of the magic throughout their lifetime.

You may have a few articles of baby clothing tucked away in a trunk somewhere as souvenirs of your childhood. You may even have a couple of your favorite storybooks or stuffed animals. Hanging onto keepsakes that remind us of special periods of our lives is a normal and healthy practice. If you were to suddenly begin *wearing* baby clothes again, however, or toting your childhood books and toys to school with you, *healthy* and *normal* would not be the words folks would use to describe you. You're not a child anymore. It's time to put away childish things.

Putting away childish things can apply not only to material possessions from our early years, it can apply to images and ideas we played with when we were young as well.

When I was a child, I thought lightning was God turning the lights on and off in heaven. I thought rain was caused by the angels mopping the celestial floors. And I thought the devil was a little man in a red suit with a pitchfork, a pointed tail and a mischievous grin. But I'm not a child anymore; it's time to put away childish things.

As an adult I've learned that lightning is an electric charge that can kill people, and rain is a result of the air becoming saturated with moisture. As a maturing child of God I've learned that the devil is an actual being, not a cartoon character; he can be just as deadly as a bolt of lightning, and the world is saturated with his workers, the demons, who are a chief cause of the downfall of evil on mankind.

If we find it difficult to believe in this type of devil, or *Satan*, perhaps it's because we haven't let go of our childhood images of him. Those images may have helped us grasp adult concepts when we were little, but they can also hinder us from grasping adult concepts when we're grown. The healthy and normal thing for us to do, then, is to put away the childish images we've held, and let God teach us the truth that we're now mature enough to handle.

What is the truth about the devil? First of all, we can know only part of the truth. One of the greatest Christians to ever live, the Apostle Paul of the Bible, referred to Satan's existence as a mystery (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Perhaps when we're in heaven with God we'll finally be mature enough to grasp the entire truth. For now, here is what we can be sure of:

Satan is God's arch enemy. Isaiah 14:12, 14 tells us that Satan was once one of God's holy angels. But Satan wasn't satisfied to serve God; he

wanted to *be* God. This sin caused Satan and numerous other angels who followed him to be cast out of heaven forever. From that day until now, Satan and his helpers have been working nonstop to destroy anything that reminds them of God. That includes you and me. God's arch enemy is our arch enemy as well. Jesus called him the thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Satan works through deception. He's been called the great counterfeiter and the father of lies. Whatever God offers us, Satan offers us a near replica. The difference is, what God offers leads to life. What Satan offers leads to death and destruction. Our only tool for battling the father of lies is *the truth*. God's Word is the truth, and Jesus is God's Word in the flesh. Jesus said about Himself, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life ...*" (John 14:6).

Satan is like a roaring lion ... with his teeth knocked out. Satan would like to destroy us, because God loves us and he hates God. But when Jesus died on the cross and God raised Him from the dead, Satan dropped his teeth. He has no power over those who have Jesus Christ living in them.

*"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them (Satan and his demons), because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world,"* (1 John 4:4).

The Bible has much more to say about Satan and his demons. But for now, knowing that he exists, that he's out to destroy us through deception, and that we have power over him through Christ is a good step in setting aside the cartoon image of the little man in the red suit with a pitchfork, a pointed tail and a mischievous grin. It's a good step toward putting away childish things.

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY**

1. Do you have trouble believing in the devil of the Bible? Why or why not?
2. Satan is called "the father of lies." What are some of the lies that people in your school buy into?
3. Are there any particular lies you sometimes are tempted to believe? If so, which ones?

Ask God to teach you His truth you need to combat these lies. Ask your Young Life leader to help you find some specific Bible verses to use in fighting Satan's deception in these areas.

*Father of Truth,*

*I guess this journey we've begun is not going to be without its dangers along the way. It sounds like Satan and his band of thieves are waiting all along the trail to ambush us. Thanks, God, that they don't stand a chance against You. Their flimsy arrows of deception look like toys from a department store next to the impenetrable shield of truth I have in You.*

*Lord, talk to me. Tell me the truth. Tell it to me all day long so Satan can't trip me up. And help me to listen. Help me to listen closely to Your Word, the Bible, and to Your Word in the flesh, Jesus. It's good to know that "greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world."*

*Father — keep me from making the same mistake Satan made — the mistake that cost him paradise with You, the mistake of trying to be God. Too many times I take the controls of my life out of Your hands and try to do things on my own. I try to be God. Forgive me, Father. Once again I give You the controls of my life. You direct. I'll follow.*

*Help me to remember, too, Lord, that any time I lie, even just a little, I'm helping your arch enemy gain ground in this world. Keep my lips from speaking deceit, Father.*

*Here's to putting away childish things. Here's to the truth. Amen.*

# DAY FIFTEEN

## On Down the Road ...

### From the Bible

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9 and John 14:1-4

You have a lot to look forward to in your journey of learning to love God. Not only has God scattered incredible surprises all along the path you are traveling here on Earth, but the path that leads to loving God ultimately leads to paradise as well. It leads us to heaven. First, let's look at the surprises God has scattered along the path of your life.

What are the deepest desires of your heart? Do you know? God does. And He longs to grant you those desires more than you long to have them granted. In Psalm 37:4 we read, "*Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*" In Jeremiah 29:11 God tells us, "*For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future.*" Jesus says in John 10:10 that He has come to give us *abundant life*. One of the verses you read from the Bible today said we can't even conceive the things God has prepared for us.

Use your imagination. Try and imagine yourself so full of life you can't contain it all. Try and imagine God granting the deepest desires of your heart. Whatever you can imagine, it doesn't come close to what God has planned for you. "*No human mind has conceived the things that God has prepared for those who love Him,*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). If we trust God to direct our lives, if we will spend our life deliberately growing in our love for Him, we will begin to uncover the treasures He has buried along the path for us, treasures such as meaningful relationships, discovery of our personal talents and gifts, opportunities to use our personal gifts in ways we never dreamed, challenges and thrills that keep our hearts pounding and our eyes wide open. Each treasure along the way will convince us a little more of the intimate love the Father has for us. In the end, the discovery of that love is the greatest treasure of all.

But the treasures God scatters throughout our lives on Earth aren't even worthy to be compared to the surprises He has in store for us in heaven.

Most of us have problems when it comes to thinking about heaven. Much like our problems with thinking about Satan, we can't seem to get over our childhood images of heaven. We still imagine angels floating on white clouds, playing golden harps. In fact, some of us are afraid we might get a little bored in a state of eternal bliss. The problem is, anything we can imagine, no matter how great it is, eventually would get old and boring when stretched out over eternity. But, again, 1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us we can't even begin to imagine what God has in store for us. Heaven cannot be reduced to a size that fits into the human brain.

We can, however, think of a few things that will help us *begin* to begin imagining heaven. Think of the 10 best moments of your life. One would probably be the moment you first discovered God's love for you. One might be a sunny day spent at the beach with some friends, or the time you laughed so hard your stomach muscles ached. Whatever your 10 best moments are, they're all moments that were a result of God's goodness and creativity. And as far as God's goodness and creativity are concerned, the best is yet to come.

We see only part of God's goodness on Earth; His goodness here is eclipsed by the obstacle of our sinfulness. As for His creativity, Jesus tells us in today's reading that He is still busy at work, creating great things for us in heaven. We can trust that the God who created the 10 best moments of our lives can come up with infinitely more that will thrill us for all eternity. And the source of it all will be the thrill of finally seeing *Him* face to face.

You have a lot to look forward to in your journey of learning to love God – abundant life here and indescribable life hereafter. Both are merely pocket change compared to the wealth of love that will be continually exchanged between you and the Father. Imagine that. *You can't.*

## QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. What do you think are the deepest desires of your heart?
  - Take a moment to thank God that He knows the desires of your heart and wants to grant them to you.

Psalm 37:4 says, "*Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*" What does it mean to "take delight in the Lord"?

2. When you were small, how did you imagine heaven?
  - How do you imagine heaven now?

4. Just for fun – what have been five of your best moments in life so far?

Trust that God can do infinitely more in your life than what you've mentioned above.

*Dear Lord,*

*You're the God of good news. You created me, came after me, died for me, and are recreating me from within. Besides all that, You've hidden treasures I can't imagine all along the path of this life, and prepared things for me I can't comprehend after this life.*

*Yet, Lord, I'm convinced that You're the real treasure in my life. The good stuff of this life is discovering You over and over again to greater depths. And the good stuff of heaven will be finally seeing You face to face.*

*In the name of Jesus who is still preparing my way ... Amen.*

**HEY!** You've finished your journal! Good job. Now what? This journal is finished, but the journey keeps on going. Here's a suggestion for you:

- Read through the book of John, a few verses every day.
- Record any thoughts or questions you have in a notebook, your new journal! (Feel free to corner your Young Life leader with the questions later!)
- Be sure to use your Bible study questions from Day Four.
- Transfer your prayer list from Day Six from this journal into your new journal.

Be sure and date each journal entry and record which verses you read. You might also want to record any answered prayers. (For an example journal entry and other suggested activities, see the next page).

Happy trails to you as you travel through life with the Lord!

See you at the end of the road ...

Donna Hatasaki

# A SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY

July 10, 2018

John 1:1-4

**From my prayer list:** Mom, Grandpa, my plans for the weekend, my friend who doesn't know Jesus

**From the Bible:** What is God revealing to me about Himself: God is the Creator of everything. He is the Source of life — physical and spiritual. What is God revealing to me about myself? I need Him to see how to get around this world.

**Questions and thoughts I've had about what I've read:** What does it mean when it says "the Word?" Who is "he" in verse 2? What I've read today is so true. Since I've begun my relationship with God, I feel alive like never before.

**My prayer:** Lord, thank You for the life You've given me. Thank You for meeting with me this morning. It's amazing to think You've always been around, and that everything that is came from You. Lord, take care of Mom, today. Help her in her new job. Help me to make her load lighter today with my attitudes and actions. Please help Grandpa, too. Send someone to talk to him today. Give the people who take care of him compassion and kindness for him.

Lord, what should I do about this weekend? Should I go out with my friends Saturday night? What can we do, Lord, that would be fun but wouldn't drag down my relationship with You?

Sam doesn't know You, yet, Lord. Please talk to him and bring him around. If You want to use me to talk to him, bring the opportunity and give me the words.

Lord, thanks for answering my prayers concerning what church I should go to. You've really made it clear and made me feel comfortable at Green Valley.

Lead me through the day, Lord. And talk to me all along the way. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

## **OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP TO THIS JOURNAL:**

- Re-read this journal. In a notebook keep any thoughts, questions, prayers.
- Ask your Young Life leader to suggest other books or journals. There are lots out there!





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