

A Boy King and A Great Book

2 Kings 22, 23

Long, long ago there lived a boy who at the age of eight years woke one morning to find himself a king. His father and grandfather, also kings, had not been good ones; for they caused their people to go away from the true God and to worship idols.

This boy king did not rule his people until he was twenty-one years old, and while he was growing up, princes ruled for him. During his growing-up days, he worked hard to prepare himself to be a good king to his people.

He decided that he did not want to be like his father or grandfather, but rather like his great, great sixteen-greats grandfather, King David. He must have read all about him—how he killed a lion, a bear, and the powerful Philistine giant, showing how brave and fearless he was. Then, too, he learned that King David was not only very brave, but good, for he had written lovely poems which told of his faith and trust in the living God who had helped him in all of his life's experiences. Because of this knowledge and more perhaps, Josiah, the boy king of Judah, determined to follow David's God and to try to be the best king that a man could possibly be.

When he began his work, he found much to do and to undo. First he had to purify his kingdom from idolatry, so he tore down every altar that had been built to idols. Then after that, he turned to the splendid task of repairing the temple, God's house of worship, which had been so long neglected that it was now a ruin. Contributions were given by the people for this work of repair, and officers were appointed to have charge of the work. Two of these officers were named Shaphan, the scribe, and Hilkiah, the high priest; but many other workers were also needed to clear away all the rubbish and to restore the temple to its original beauty.

While this repair work was going on, Hilkiah found something in all that rubbish that interested him very much. He peered at it closely and then more closely. Why, it was the Book of the Law, God's Book! It had been forgotten and lost a long, long time—all during the reigns of Josiah's father and grandfather. Hilkiah took it at once to Shaphan. He began to read, trembling with excitement. He soon saw that there was not a moment to lose, so he hurried to the king with the new-found treasure and began reading it to him. The king was glad at first; but as the scribe kept on reading to him, he became alarmed and very sad. There was bad news in the Book for him and his people; for God had given many commandments in it that the people had not kept for years, and warnings of great punishment that would come to those who forsook Him and His ways.

Anxiously, the distressed king, who loved God and His people, sought counsel. He sent off messengers to see a woman living in Jerusalem. The woman, named Huldah, was a prophetess. She sent this message back to the king, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: 'I will hold back the punishment while King Josiah lives because he has sought to do my will.'"

The men returned to Josiah with the message just as fast as they could, for they knew how anxiously he awaited them. After receiving the message, King Josiah called his people—men, women, and children—to meet him in the Temple of the Lord, and there he read to all the people the words of the Book that had been found, the Book that he knew was God's message to him and his people. That wasn't all; he also made a covenant with God to do His will, and all the people agreed with him. Because of this, God was pleased with Josiah's work and spared the nation the punishment that was to come upon it.

The good work begun by Josiah continued, and finally the priests were assembled together to be trained. A choir of Levites was enrolled, and the Temple services were held again as in the days of old.

Josiah continued all his days to serve the Lord God and to lead his people in His holy ways. He was a good king and the last great one of Judah. In describing him, the Bible says, "Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him."

Claiming God's Promise

(Joshua 3, 4)

God had promised the land of Canaan to the Israelite people, but fear had kept them from claiming the land for their own. For forty years the people wandered in the wilderness. Then God called Joshua to lead them into the promised land.

Joshua had instructed the people to get ready for the great day of moving, pack their belongings, and prepare enough food for several days! At his command, the people began marching towards Canaan. When they arrived at the River Jordan, they set up their tents for the night, and Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you!"

Early in the morning the procession began, according to the order given by the Lord: the priests went first, carrying the ark of the covenant, followed by the people and the armed warriors. The river water was deep, but God had a plan. As the priests' feet come to the brink of the water, God blocked the river from flowing, and the riverbed dried up. As they were instructed, the priests stood still on the dry riverbed until all the people crossed over.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Take twelve men from among the people, one man from each tribe, and command them to take twelve stones from the River Jordan where the priests' feet stood firm. Bear the stones over with you and put them down in the place where you shall lodge tonight."

Joshua instructed the men to gather the stones, and after all the people had crossed over the river bed, the priests also came out of the river onto the land of Canaan. Then God released the waters to flow through the river again.

And when they set their tents up for the night, Joshua spoke to the people the words God had said to him: "When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying 'What mean these stones?' then you shall let your children know, saying Israel came over this Jordan on dry land, for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan. . . ."

The people had claimed God's promise and marked the spot for future generations, as God had instructed, ". . . that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

(Exodus 2:1-10)

In an attempt to control the Israelite population in Egypt, the Pharaoh ordered a cruel decree throughout the land: Every newborn Hebrew baby boy must be cast into the Nile River. This terrible decree caused great distress among all the Hebrew people.

At this time a Levite man and his wife were living in Egypt with their son Aaron and daughter Miriam. And the mother gave birth to another son. This family loved the Lord God, and they loved the new baby boy. Secretly, they kept the newborn in their home, hiding him from the Egyptians. But as the child grew and made cries loud enough for others outside the home to hear, the mother knew she must find another way to protect her baby.

The mother made a cradle basket, woven from bulrushes that grew along the river edge. She sealed it with mud and pitch to keep the water out. Then she lined the basket with soft blankets, gently laid the baby inside, and placed the basket at the edge of the river. She instructed Miriam to stay nearby and watch over her baby brother.

Before long the Pharaoh's daughter, accompanied by her maidens, came down to wash in the river. She saw the basket and instructed one of her maids to bring it to her. As the Princess opened the basket, the baby began to cry, and she had compassion for the infant. Just then Miriam approached the Princess and asked, "Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"

The Pharaoh's daughter instructed her to go find a Hebrew woman, and Miriam quickly brought her mother back to the water's edge. The Princess said, "Take this child away to nurse it for me, and I will pay you wages."

God protected the child by providing safety in the Hebrew home, through orders of the Pharaoh's daughter. When the child grew older, the mother took him to the Princess as she was instructed. The Princess raised him as her own son, naming him Moses because she drew him out of the water.

Because of a mother's love and a faithful God, Moses was kept alive; he later became a servant to God and a great leader of the Hebrew people.

(Daniel 6:1-28)

As a young boy, Daniel had been taken captive from Jerusalem and groomed to serve the king of Babylon. He was a faithful servant to the king, but never did he compromise his faith and devotion to God. Daniel openly prayed daily to the God of Israel.

Daniel found favor in the eyes of the king and was promoted to a high position within the kingdom. However, several other men of high position became jealous of Daniel and used the new king Darius to set a trap that would sentence Daniel to death.

These men came before the king and asked for a decree stating that whoever presented a petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to the king, should be thrown into the den of lions. The unsuspecting king was flattered and signed the decree, which was designed to destroy Daniel.

When Daniel heard of the decree, he went to his window, knelt down, and prayed to God as he had always done. This time however the jealous men were watching and ran to the king to remind him of the decree, and the punishment. Then they told the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, has no regard for you or for the decree that you signed." The king was upset with himself and looked for a way to deliver Daniel from the punishment. But at sundown the men came to the king and reminded him that the decree could not be changed, and the king commanded that Daniel be thrown into the den of lions.

The king spoke to Daniel, saying, "Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." Then a stone was placed at the opening of the den, sealing Daniel in the den with the lions. The king went to his palace and fasted all night on Daniel's behalf.

First thing in the morning, the king went to the den and cried out to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Daniel responded, "O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they have not hurt me because I was innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done you no wrong."

The king excitedly commanded that Daniel be taken out of the den, and he commanded that those men who had accused Daniel be cast into the den of lions. Then the king wrote to all people, nations, and languages that lived within his kingdom, a new decree:

"I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God and steadfast forever; His kingdom shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall endure to the end."

Because of his faith in God, and because God was faithful to protect him, the name of the Lord was exalted throughout the kingdom. And Daniel prospered under the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

Acts 9:36-43

In the city of Joppa there lived a woman named Dorcas. She was a Christian-a follower of Jesus Christ. Dorcas spent her days helping people. The poor people and the widows especially loved her because she was so good and kind to them.

One day Dorcas became very, very sick. Soon she died.

Now it happened that Peter, a disciple of Jesus, was preaching in a town nearby. The friends of Dorcas had heard that Peter had done many wonderful things in the name of Jesus. "Perhaps Peter could help Dorcas even though she has already died," the friends said to each other.

So two men were sent to ask Peter to come to Joppa.

When Peter arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room where Dorcas lay. Many of Dorcas' friends were already there. The poor people of Joppa were there, too, crying and showing each other the warm coats Dorcas had made for them.

"I want everyone to leave the room," Peter said.

When everyone had gone, Peter knelt down and prayed. He asked God to bring Dorcas back to life. Then he turned to Dorcas and said, "Dorcas, get up."

Dorcas opened her eyes. She looked at Peter for a minute, and then she sat up. Peter took Dorcas by the hand and led her to the door of the room. "Come on in," Peter called to the people who were waiting downstairs. "Here is your friend Dorcas. She has been raised from the dead in the name of Jesus."

Jesus had gone back to Heaven, but He had not forgotten the disciples; He had sent the Holy Spirit just as He promised He would. The Holy Spirit gave power to the disciples and many people were turning to the Lord.

(Luke 10:38-42)

“Martha! Martha! Look who is coming!” Mary called!

Martha was excited, too, as she looked down the road. Jesus was coming! Mary and Martha were always happy to see Him come for a visit.

Mary and Martha were sisters. They and their brother, Lazarus, lived in the little village of Bethany, just east of Jerusalem, over the Mount of Olives. Often, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, He stopped to see them. They were His good friends.

But before Jesus reached the door, Martha began to worry about lunch. “What will we feed Jesus?” she wondered. “And look at the house! I must straighten things up before He gets here.” Martha was so busy cleaning and fixing and doing fussy things that she hardly had time to say hello. But as soon as she did, she quickly ran to the kitchen.

Mary didn’t care at all about lunch. She didn’t even care if she ate lunch. To her the most important thing in the world right now was to talk with Jesus. She wanted to ask Him questions and listen while He told about His home in heaven and His Father who lived there.

Martha rushed to and fro in the kitchen. She filled this pot with water and stirred things in that one. She clattered and banged things around without hearing a word that Jesus said.

Suddenly Martha realized that she was doing all the work while Mary was doing nothing. The more she fussed around with things, the more this bothered her. At last she came into the room where Mary sat by Jesus’ feet, listening carefully. “Lord, doesn’t it bother You that my sister is letting me do all the work?” she asked. It was a bit rude to ask this important guest such a question, but she did it anyway.

One might think at this point Jesus would smile and tell Mary to go help her sister get lunch. But Jesus really didn’t care if He ate lunch either. He thought it was much more important to tell Mary the things she wanted to know. “Martha, Martha,” Jesus answered. “You’re so busy and bothered doing all those things. Don’t you see that Mary has chosen what is most important? I will not take that away from her.”

Nobody knows whether Martha went back to the kitchen or sat down with Mary to listen to Jesus. But she certainly learned that it is much more important to listen to Jesus than to eat lunch. That is putting first things first.

Many years ago little George Frederick Handel loved to go with his Aunt Anna to church in the German town of Halle. She knew that the music of the church carried George out of himself into a new and wonderful world.

George was so full of music that he could not keep still. He learned to play the organ and every other instrument he could find. While still young he wrote music and taught choirs and orchestras to sing and play it. Sometimes this was good music, but sometimes it was written so hurriedly that it was not worthy of the little boy who dreamed of it.

As the years went on, sometimes Handel was praised by music lovers in Italy, Germany, and England; sometimes they refused to listen to him or buy tickets for the concerts by which he made his living. Sometimes he was the guest of kings and cardinals; sometimes it seemed that nobody cared whether he wrote another note.

In 1741, when he was fifty-six years old, everything seemed against him. He had worked hard all his life, paying no attention to his health. Now he was terribly tired and crippled with rheumatism. Nobody was asking him to write music. He had no money to hire singers or a theater in which they could sing. The world seemed to have forgotten him. For weeks and months he wrote nothing.

Then one day in London a message came from a friend. It was a collection of Bible verses arranged to tell what the coming of Jesus means to the world. Handel sat down, tired and discouraged, to read the verses, knowing that his friend thought he could write music for them. As he read, the feeling came back that he used to have as a little boy, and his heart overflowed with music praising God.

It was an old, old story that the verses told, but a story that could be heard over and over without wearing out. Handel knew that he must write music that would make the story more beautiful than it had ever been before.

For twenty-four days Handel did not leave home. He scarcely left the room where he was writing. His manservant sometimes brought food and set it beside him, then came back later and saw that Handel had not noticed it. Once this servant found him, just after he had finished part of the oratorio called the "Hallelujah Chorus," sitting with tears streaming down his cheeks, saying, "I thought I saw all heaven before me and the great God Himself!"

It was seven months later that this oratorio, the MESSIAH, was sung for the first time. Handel treasured it so dearly that he did not wish to have it sung in London, where people had not been listening to his music. When he received an invitation to go to Ireland, he took the new oratorio with him. He waited for weeks while he found that they liked his other music and while he had time to train the choirs of two great cathedrals until they could sing the music perfectly together.

The night came. The hall was crowded with people who came to hear the music that had never been heard before except in rehearsals. All over the hall came the same feeling of wonder and worship that the little George Handel had felt when his Aunt Anna took him to hear the music.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." Those who knew their Bible recognized the words of the prophet Isaiah telling the children of Israel that Someone was coming to lead them out of their sorrows.

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain." The song gave the words of different prophets— Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

After the ringing chords giving the names of the Child that the prophets of old said would be born, the music turned suddenly soft and quiet. The audience could see a hillside in Bethlehem.

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“There were shepherds abiding in the field.” The song told the story of the shepherds and the song of the angels. The people listening felt they were out on the hillside with the shepherds, listening to the angels’ song: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

“Hallelujah! ... for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! ... The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords ... Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!”

Over and over the choirs sang the hallelujahs. More and more the listening people felt the nearness of God that the little George had felt in the church with his Aunt Anna. They felt the nearness of God that Handel had felt when he wrote the MESSIAH.

Later, when the oratorio was played in London, it seemed perfectly natural for the whole audience, including King George II, to stand when the “Hallelujah Chorus” was played. Sometimes today people say that we rise to our feet for that chorus because an English King stood for it. We really stand to pay respect to the King about whom the song is written, the King who was born in Bethlehem.

(1 Kings 17)

For quite some time there had been a drought in Israel. There was no rain or dew, the fields could not yield a harvest, and all the brooks had dried up. Even the brook Cherith, beside which the prophet Elijah had been dwelling, went dry. Elijah heard the word of the Lord telling him what to do.

“Arise, go to Zarephath,” God said, “and live there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”

So Elijah went to the city. Approaching it, he saw a woman gathering sticks. He called and asked her to bring him a drink of water. As she went to get it, he called to her again and asked her to bring him a piece of bread. She turned to him, wondering who this man was that did not seem to know there was famine in the land.

“As the Lord your God lives,” she said, “I do not have any bread, just a handful of flour in a bin and a little oil in a jar. I am gathering a couple of sticks so that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”

“Do not fear,” Elijah said to her. “Go and do as you have said. But make me a little bread from it first, and bring it to me, and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.’”

Marveling at Elijah’s words, but willing to believe them, the woman went home and did what was asked of her. She also prepared a room for Elijah in her house, and all the time he remained in Zarephath, Elijah stayed there. And all of them had plenty to eat, for neither the bin nor the jar became empty.

Then one day the woman’s son became sick, so sick that he could not breathe. In her sorrow she chided Elijah, for she thought she must have done some great wrong to have such evil come to her as the death of her son.

“Give me your son,” Elijah said, and he gently took the child from the woman’s arms and carried him to his own room. Elijah laid the boy on the bed and prayed to God. Then he stretched himself upon the child, once, twice, three times, and never stopped praying.

“O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come back into him,” Elijah said over and over. Then the child began to breathe. He opened his eyes and, seeing Elijah, smiled at him. Elijah carried the boy to his mother, who was weeping.

“See, your son is living,” Elijah said as he stood the boy on his feet beside her.

When she saw her son standing, strong and well, the widow woman looked up at Elijah and said, “Now, by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.”

Mark 4:35-41

One evening Jesus was very tired. All day long He had talked to the fathers, mothers, and children. He had tried to help them in all their trouble and had made many sick people well. Now it was evening. One by one the stars came out and shone in the dark sky. Most of the people had gone away. Only Peter, John, and the other disciples stood and talked with Jesus beside the lake.

Peter's boat was pulled up on the shore where he had left it in the morning when he had come from fishing. "Come," said Jesus, "Let us get into the water." Jesus had a pillow. Perhaps some father, mother, or little child had seen how tired Jesus was and had brought it to Him. As the boat sailed quietly out across the lake, Jesus fell fast asleep with His head resting on the little pillow. Peter and the others talked together very softly so as not to wake Him.

But suddenly the wind began to blow. Harder and harder it blew. It tossed the boat up and down on the water. It splashed over, filling the boat, but Jesus, His head on the pillow, was fast asleep. Peter and the others began to work hard. They tried to empty the water out of the boat, but as they worked other big waves splashed over them, almost sending it down. They worked harder; they were tired and wet and cold, but Jesus was still fast asleep.

"We will drown!" cried Peter. "We cannot get the water out of the boat. We'll drown!" Frightened, they held to the side of the boat, and the wind blew the water higher and higher. "Master," cried one of the men, "Wake up; we're drowning! Don't you care that we are in such great trouble?" Jesus heard, and He woke up and came to them. He heard the angry wind and saw Peter and the others, cold, wet, tired, and afraid, holding fast to the boat filled with water.

Quietly, He reached His hands over the water and spoke to it. "Peace!" He said. "Be still!" And to the angry wind He said: "Be quiet; stop blowing. It is Jesus who speaks to you!"

As Jesus spoke, suddenly the wind stopped blowing. The lake was very still again, the storm was gone, and the little boat sailed quietly over the lake. Then Jesus turned to Peter and the others. "Why were you so afraid?" He asked. "I was right here with you. Didn't you know that I would take care of you? You don't ever need to be afraid when I am with you."

And the disciples said, "What a wonderful person He is! Even the winds and the seas obey Him."

It was Christmas Eve, and after Bobby had carefully hung his stocking by the fireplace he went off to bed. Usually Bobby did not like to go to bed early, but tonight he was eager to get to sleep so as to be sure to wake up early to see his gifts.

For their Bible lesson that day, Bobby and his father had read Jesus' own words to His friends found in John 15:22. Five words had stayed in Bobby's mind, and he kept saying them over and over again until he fell asleep. They were the words, "IF I HAD NOT COME."

It seemed as if he had not been asleep any time when a cross, harsh voice said: "Get up, get up, I tell you. It's time to get up."

Thinking about the skates he wanted and the flashlight and the motor and the books for which he'd been wishing, Bobby got up and hurried into his clothing and went downstairs. But all was still. No one was there to greet him; no stocking hung beside the fireplace; no wreaths were in the window; no splendid tree was there.

Hurrying to the door, Bobby looked down the street. The factory was open, and he could hear the rumble of the machinery. He grabbed his cap and sweater and raced down the street to the factory door, and there stood a grim-looking foreman.

"What's the factory running for on Christmas?" asked Bobby.

"Christmas?" asked the man. "What do you mean? I never heard that word. This is one of our busy days, so you clear out of here."

Filled with wonder, Bobby hurried on down the street toward the stores, and to his amazement he found them all open. The grocer, the dry-goods man, the baker, each one was busy and cross, and each said in reply to his question, "Christmas, what's Christmas?"

When Bobby tried to explain, "It's Christ's birthday" and that the first part of the word "Christmas" means "Christ," he was gruffly ordered to move along, as this was a very busy day.

Going around the corner, he thought, "I'll go to the church, our own church, for there's to be a Christmas service there." All at once Bobby stopped short before a big vacant field and mumbled to himself, "I guess I'm lost. I was certain our church was here. I know it was." Then he noticed a signboard in the center of the big vacant lot, and coming closer he read the words, "IF I HAD NOT COME."

The puzzled boy was wandering gloomily along when he thought of the box of toys and games his class had sent to the Orphans' Home, and he said half aloud, "I guess I'll go up to the Home and see the children get their presents." But when Bobby reached the place, instead of seeing the name of the Home over the gateway, he read these same five words, "IF I HAD NOT COME," and beyond the archway there was no orphanage.

Seeing an old man, feeble and ill, by the roadside, Bobby said "I guess you're sick, Mister. I'll run to the hospital and tell them to send an ambulance for you." But when he reached the grounds, no splendid building was to be seen, nothing but signs and posters bearing the words, "IF I HAD NOT COME."

As Bobby hurried back to the corner where the Rescue Mission had been, he said, "I'm sure they'll take the poor old man in there, anyway." But men with angry faces were gambling and swearing. Over the door Bobby saw, instead of the name of the mission, the same words, "IF I HAD NOT COME." Thinking still about the poor old man, Bobby hurried home to ask his father and mother to help him.

On his way across the living room, he wanted to look up in a Bible the words "IF I HAD NOT COME." Turning past the pages of the Old Testament, he found that there was no new part. After Malachi all the pages were blank, and as he held them up to the light, on each one he saw a faint outline of the words "IF I HAD NOT COME."

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With a sigh Bobby said, “Oh what a terrible world this is-no Christmas, no churches, no homes for little orphan children, no hospitals, no rescue missions, no almshouses-nothing but jails and gambling houses and police patrols and sickness and wrong and . . .”

Just then there came the sound of bells. The chimes were playing. Bobby listened and sure enough, it was his favorite hymn, “Joy to the World, the Lord is Come,” and then he heard his mother’s cheery voice saying, “Wake up! Merry Christmas, Bobby!”

With a joyous bound Bobby was out of bed. Kneeling, he said, “O Lord Jesus, I thank you that you did come, and I’ll show you how thankful I am by always trying to be the kind of boy you want me to be.”

(1 Samuel 17:22-51)

David, the son of Jesse, had been chosen by God to be the future king of Israel. But David was just a boy, and it was not his time to be king, so he continued at home, keeping charge of his father's sheep.

Sometime later, when David's older brothers were serving in the king's army, David's father asked him to go see his brothers and take them food. While he was with his brothers, David heard the challenge that had come frequently to the Israelite army from Goliath, the giant of the Philistine army: "Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you will be our servants."

No one in all the camp of Israel rose to answer Goliath, so the giant cried out again, "I defy the armies of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together."

David was distressed that no one from the king's army answered the challenge, and he talked to his brothers and the soldiers about it. At first David angered the men, but then they realized this was someone ready to accept Goliath's challenge. They informed King Saul about David, and the king sent for him. David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "You are not able to fight against this Philistine; for you are just a youth, and he is a man of war."

David responded by telling Saul that he had killed a bear and a lion while keeping his father's sheep, and he continued, "The Lord that delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear. He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul then said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you." Saul gave David his own suit of armor, but it was too heavy for the boy to wear. Instead, he chose five smooth stones from the brook, and with his sling in his hand, went forth to meet Goliath.

Seeing a boy approach to answer the challenge angered Goliath, and he mocked David. David said to him, "You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

As the Philistine approached, David took a stone from his bag and, using his sling, struck the Philistine in the forehead. Goliath fell on his face to the earth. Then, using the giant's own sword, David killed him. When the Philistine army saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

That day David earned the respect of the Israelite army and of King Saul when he went out and defeated the enemy in the name of the Lord.

Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

One day when Jesus stood on the street, with a great crowd of mothers, fathers, and little children gathered around Him, a father came running down the street and pushed through the crowd to Jesus. "O Master," he said, as he fell at Jesus' feet, "My little girl is very sick. The doctors say that she will not get well. Will you come with me to see her? I know you can help her."

Tenderly, Jesus spoke to the father, whose name was Jairus. "Yes, I will come," He said, "I will go with you now. Show me where you live." They started down the street toward Jairus' house, but the people crowded around Jesus. There were so many that wanted Him. They could not let Him go.

One poor woman, ill for many years with a sickness the doctors could not cure, tried to get through the crowd to Jesus to look into His face or touch His hand. But there were so many around Him that He did not see her. Following behind Him, loving Him, she reached through the crowd and softly, lovingly, touched the hem of His garment. As she touched it, a wonderful thing happened. Jesus knew she had touched His clothes, so He turned and spoke to her. He took her hand tenderly and told her He was glad to help her. But as He waited to talk to her, a man came running through the crowd to Jairus, who was walking at Jesus' side.

"Do not bother Jesus. It is too late now. He doesn't need to come; the little girl is dead." Jesus heard, and turning to the little girl's father, said: "Don't be afraid. I can bring your little girl back to you even now. Take me to her." And quickly they passed through the crowd to Jairus' house. A crowd of neighbors had already gathered around the door, for they had heard that a little girl had died, and they had come to comfort the poor mother.

They stepped back as Jesus came. Some of them knew Him. Often they saw Him go in and out of the homes where there was trouble. "It is too late," they said to Him sadly as He passed by them going into the house. "The little girl is dead. All the time, the mother cries; you can do nothing for her."

In the back room, they found the mother, her shawl thrown over her head, moaning and crying to herself beside the little girl's bed. Gently, Jesus touched her. "Do not cry, mother," He said; "your little girl is not dead; she is only asleep. See, I have come! I will help you. Do not cry so." The neighbors came crowding into the room, but He sent them all away. Then He stood beside the bed where the little girl lay very still and white, and took the little hand in His. Softly He whispered her name. "Little maid," He called, "come!"

"She does not hear," cried the mother, lifting her head. "She will not come back to me any more. My little girl is dead." But the little girl had heard the Lord Jesus call. As He watched, slowly the color came back into her cheeks; slowly she opened her eyes and looked straight into His. She smiled, and then slowly she turned her head and laid her little cheek, warm and rosy, against His hand. Gently He turned to the father and mother. "Your little girl is well," He said. "Give her something to eat, and she will feel stronger." He lifted the little girl up, and the mother caught her into her arms and held her close. She was alive and well, and was talking to her mother.

Mark 8:22-26

One day, on a street through which Jesus often passed, there sat a blind man. He could not work and earn money for his family, and so, because he did not know any better way, every morning he went out and sat in the street where the people were passing by and asked them for pennies. All day he sat with his back up against one of the houses listening to people who could see as they went up and down the street. He heard the fathers as they went by on their way to work in the morning. He heard the mothers as they went out into the street to buy from the men selling fish and bread. He heard the children as they ran past him in happy play. "Oh," he often thought, "If only I, too, could go up and down the street as they do!"

One day as he sat listening, he heard shouting and talking and tramping of feet as if a great many people were passing by. He heard the little children talking happily together as they ran along with the rest. Reaching out his hand, he caught hold of a mother's shawl as she was passing by. "Tell me," he asked, "where are all these people going? Why is there such a crowd?"

"Jesus is passing by," the mother told him, "and all the people follow because they love Him so. He makes sick people well. He feeds the hungry people. He is good to the poor and helps all who come to Him. The children love Him, too; they are always around Him."

The blind man thought a minute as the mother hurried on with the rest. Perhaps Jesus could help him too. "Jesus," he cried, trying to stumble along with the others, "help me; help me, too."

The people following Jesus turned and spoke roughly to the beggar. "It is a shame to call after Him," they said. "Let Him pass."

But the blind man only called louder, "Jesus, Jesus, do not pass by; help me, too."

Jesus heard and turning back, asked someone to bring the blind man to Him. "How can I help you?" He asked gently, as the dirty and ragged beggar stood beside Him.

"O Jesus," cried the blind man, "only help me so that I can see as other people do."

Tenderly Jesus touched his eyes, "Because you called to me in your trouble, you shall see," He said. And suddenly the blind man could see the street, the houses, the people, and most beautiful of all, the face of Jesus as He looked tenderly at him. As Jesus walked on down the street, the father, now no longer a blind beggar, followed him with the rest, so glad that Jesus had passed by that day and had heard his call.

Matthew 14:22-36

Do you remember the day that Jesus went to Jairus' house and brought the little girl back to her father and mother again? Do you remember how glad they were? A great crowd of fathers, mothers and children had gathered around the house, for they had heard that a little girl had died there, and that the mother was in the house crying. Some came to try and comfort the poor mother. When Jesus came out into the street again, they heard that the little girl was not dead but alive and well, and that in some wonderful way Jesus had brought her back to the poor mother. They crowded around Him and followed Him down the street.

In the crowd were two blind men. They walked along slowly, feeling the way with their hands, listening to the crowd as they talked about Jesus and what He had done. All around them was darkness. They could not see the street, the houses, the people, the flowers, the trees, or the faces of their own little children at home. How they wanted to see! Perhaps some dreadful sickness had made them blind, or perhaps they had gotten hurt in some way at their work. If they could only get to Jesus, they thought. But there was no one to bring them, and He went faster than they could go. Besides, they could not find their way to Him through the crowd. "Jesus," they called, stumbling along, "wait for us! Oh, help us, too!"

But there were so many in the crowd talking together that Jesus did not hear them call. He was stopping now; He was going into some house. The blind men would go to Him there. They pushed through the crowd, stumbling into the house, and, feeling their way along the walls, came to Jesus. "Jesus, we are blind; help us to see again!" they cried.

They could not see His face, but, oh, how wonderfully sweet His voice sounded as He asked tenderly, "Do you really believe that I can make you see again?"

"Yes," they answered softly. If they could only see His face! In some way they felt that He loved them, that He cared about them, and that because He loved them He could make all things right. Gently He touched their eyes, and suddenly they could see. Beside them stood Jesus. They thought His face was the most beautiful face in all the world. Oh, how good to be able to see! Thanking Jesus, they ran out into the crowd, and everywhere they went, they told the people of Jesus and how He had made them see again.

Matthew 9:27-31

Do you remember the day that Jesus fed all the hungry people from the two fishes and five little loaves of bread? As it began to grow dark, little by little, the mothers and fathers gathered the children together and started around the lake toward home. What a beautiful day it had been! Many little children, whom the mothers had carried in their arms because some dreadful sickness had twisted the little legs or backs so that they could not walk, now ran happily beside their mothers. Fathers that had been blind could see now, and mothers who had felt dreadful pain found that at Jesus' touch the pain had gone away. Tomorrow they would go out again to find Him and to be near Him, the mothers thought as they walked along.

Peter and John and the others who had come in the boat with Jesus had already started back over the lake toward home, but Jesus was not with them. He was very tired from helping so many sick people all day long, and he wanted to be alone for a little while with His Father, to talk with Him about the work He still had to do. He climbed up a hill a little way and lay down to rest, looking up at the beautiful, shining stars in the dark sky.

But suddenly the wind began to blow fiercer and louder. It shook the trees and tossed the water in the lake into great waves. Had Peter and the others reached home yet? Jesus wondered. No, they were out in the storm. Far across the lake He could see a little boat tossed up and down in the water. Louder and louder blew the wind. They would be frightened. He would go to them and help them. Out He stepped on to the water and right across the lake through the fierce wind and the dreadful storm he walked to save them. He was nearer now. He could see the little boat almost covered with the big waves. He could see Peter and the others trying to keep the water out of the boat. Not far away little lights shone out from the houses along the shore where the mothers and babies were waiting for them.

Perhaps, as Peter and the others thought of their families, they worked the harder, but the wind blew the little boat around. The wind was stronger than the fathers' strong arms. But Jesus was coming. He was not far off now, and they saw Him coming, walking across the water to them: "It is I; it is Jesus. I am coming, Peter, John. Do not be afraid."

Could it be Jesus? They had left Him on the hillside. How could He have reached them through the storm without a boat? "Jesus," called Peter, "if it is you, call me, and I will come to you."

The wind blew loudly, and the boat rocked up and down, but Peter heard Jesus call through the storm, "Come," and he stepped over the side of the boat and out into the water and, with his eyes on Jesus' face, walked to meet Him.

But suddenly the water rose around his feet, the wind blew very hard, and Peter forgot to look at Jesus. He was only looking at the water, and he began to be afraid. "Jesus," he cried, "hold me; I am going down."

Jesus heard. He was beside Peter now. He reached out His hand and lifted him up. "Peter," He said sorrowfully, "why were you afraid? Didn't you know I was near you? Didn't you know I could take care of you?" Together they stepped into the boat, and suddenly the wind stopped blowing, and the water was very quiet, and the storm was over.

Early in the morning the little boat reached the shore, but Peter and the others knew that it was the Lord Jesus who had brought them safely back through the storm to the mothers and little children waiting for them at home.

Mark 6:32-44

One day the sky was so blue and the fields were so full of lovely flowers that a boy in the land where Jesus lived thought that it would be a beautiful day to take his lunch and walk way out into the fields and over the hills, picking flowers and listening to the birds. His mother wrapped two little fishes and five little loaves of bread in a paper and, taking them with him, he ran off toward the lake. But, as he came near the lake, he saw a great crowd of people. Yes, Jesus must be there. Perhaps they were bringing the little sick children to Him and He was making them well. Through the fields toward the lake the boy ran. Yes, there was Jesus, but He was getting into a boat with Peter and John. He was going away across the lake. The little boy thought that He looked very tired. The boy stood watching as the boat moved away. "Come," said some of the mothers and fathers to one another, "let us follow Him. We can go through the field, around the lake. We cannot let Him go." They started running, and the little boy followed them. Some of the fathers were lame and could not walk fast, and many sick mothers stumbled and fell by the way, but on they went to find Jesus.

When Jesus stepped out of the boat on the other shore, they were all waiting for Him. All day long He stayed with them, making sick fathers and mothers well, taking little children into His arms and helping all who came to Him. All day the little boy stayed close beside Him, watching Him as He took the little sick children tenderly in His arms and made them well. But it was beginning to get dark now. All day the people had been with Jesus, and they had had nothing to eat. "What shall we do?" Philip whispered to Jesus. "Shall we tell them to go away?"

Jesus looked at the great crowd of fathers, mothers, and little children, and He loved them. "No," He said, "do not send them away. We'll take care of them. We'll give them something to eat."

"But," said Philip, "we have no lunch even for ourselves, and there are no stores near where we can buy anything. How shall we get anything to eat?" The boy had been listening, and suddenly a glad thought came to him. He would give Jesus the little lunch that his mother had fixed for him. Quietly he whispered about it to Andrew, and Andrew took the little bundle from him and brought it to Jesus. Holding in His hands the two little fishes and five loaves, Jesus called to all the fathers, mothers, and little children to sit down in circles all over the grass. Then, as the people folded their hands and bowed their heads, out under the trees among the flowers, Jesus said "thank you" to His Father, just as we do at mealtime.

The little boy watching saw not just two fishes and five loaves, but baskets and baskets full—as much as the people could eat. Afterward, Jesus asked the people to pick up all the crusts of bread so as to keep the grass clean, or else that they might feed the scraps to the hungry birds and animals ... and there were twelve great baskets full of the crumbs.

The people did not understand the wonderful thing that had happened, but they knew that Jesus had fed them when they were hungry because He loved them.

Luke 15:3-7

Once upon a time there was a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. He loved every one and knew every one by name. Every morning he opened wide the gate of the little sheepfold, where they stayed at night, and gently calling to the sheep, led them up the hillside where they could find plenty of fresh, sweet grass to eat. They must have water to drink, too. They were afraid to drink from the streams where the water ran fast, and tumbled and bubbled against the stones, so the shepherd would lead them to some quiet little pool where the water was still and they could drink and not be afraid.

All day the shepherd went before them, tapping his stick on the ground to feel for any holes hidden in the long grass, in which the little sheep might catch their feet and stumble, and also scare away any big black snakes that might try to bite at their feet as they passed. There were great, steep places, too, over which the sheep might fall and get hurt, and when they wandered near these places the shepherd called gently and they came running to his side. Often a baby sheep, called a lamb, would fall by the way and get hurt, or grow tired from the long climb up the hill, and the shepherd would pick it up and carry it gently in his arms.

One day, as the sheep and the little lambs were feeding on the hillside, the wind began to blow, great black clouds rolled across the sky, and suddenly big drops of rain began to fall. A bad storm was coming, the shepherd knew, and he must get his sheep home before they became frightened. "Little sheep, little sheep," he called gently. Running along, tumbling over one another, the sheep and little lambs came, and down the hill they followed the shepherd. As they reached the door of the sheepfold, he stepped to one side to let them pass through, counting them as they went. "One, two, three, four," the shepherd counted, laying his hand gently on each little woolly back, as the sheep pattered by— "ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine"—but that was all.

One little sheep was missing. One little sheep had been left behind in the cold and rain. Just then a big, white mother sheep came close to the shepherd and, looking up into his face, said "Baa, Baa."

"What is it Snowball?" the shepherd asked. "What troubles you?" "Baa, baa," said the mother sheep again. Then the shepherd knew. "Is it Blackie, Snowball? Is it your baby that is lost?"

Yes, it was Blackie. The little black lamb, Snowball's baby, was not in the sheepfold with the others. He must have been left behind in the storm. Perhaps he had not listened to the shepherd's voice and had wandered away and fallen into some deep hole.

Outside the wind blew, and the rain fell faster and faster, but the shepherd buttoned his overcoat around him and, lighting a lantern so that he could find the path better, opened the gate of his sheepfold, and went up the hill in the storm to find the little lost lamb. "Little sheep, little sheep," he called as he climbed over the hill, swinging his lantern. But no little sheep answered his call. Up the hill he went. He stumbled and fell in the darkness, and his hands and feet were cut on the sharp stones. He was cold and wet and tired, but still he walked on, calling softly, "Blackie, little sheep, little sheep." What was that he heard? Through the noise of the wind and the rain, away off somewhere the shepherd heard a very faint little "Baa."

Oh, how gladly he ran over the stones to find the little lost lamb! "Little sheep, little sheep," he called. "Baa" came the little cry again, nearer this time. There, caught fast in a deep hole, the lamb looked up into the shepherd's face. "Baa," he said. One little leg was broken and he could not move it. Gently the shepherd lifted the little lamb in his arms and, wrapping his overcoat around him, he started to find his way back to the sheepfold in the storm. The shepherd did not know that his face had been cut when he fell on the sharp stones and was bleeding. He did not know that his shoes had been torn from his feet. He knew only that he had found the little sheep he loved, and he was very, very glad.

As he opened the gate of the sheepfold, all was still. The sheep were fast asleep in the hay. Only Snowball was watching. She ran to the shepherd's side, and he put little Blackie down beside her. Then tenderly he carried the little lamb into the house, where he bound up the broken leg and gave him some warm milk to drink. After a while the little lamb grew well again and could go up the hill each morning with the others to eat the fresh, sweet grass, but he always kept very close to the shepherd and ran quickly when he heard him calling.

(Acts 3:1-11)

“Alms for the poor! Alms for the poor!”

The poor man sat by the gate that led into the Temple of Jerusalem. He was crippled, and at that time crippled people could not find a job. It was hard for even a strong, healthy man to find enough work to feed his family. So a crippled man, like a blind or deaf man, almost always had to become a beggar.

That was the way he did it. All day he sat by a gate or beside a road and asked people for “alms,” gifts of money for himself and his family.

“Alms for the poor!” he cried out when Peter and John entered the Temple. It was three o’clock in the afternoon, a time when people went to the Temple for prayer.

Most of the people passed by the beggar without giving him a thing. After all, this fellow had been sitting here by the gate each day for many years. Some days they gave him a coin, and some days they didn’t.

Peter and John stopped. Peter stared at him, while the man kept on crying out for alms.

Suddenly the man realized that Peter was staring at him. He stopped his noisy cries. But he would not look into Peter’s eyes.

“Look at me!” Peter commanded.

Slowly the beggar looked up at Peter. His eyes looked into Peter’s eyes. Then he slowly held out his hand for the coin he thought Peter would give him.

“I have no silver or gold coins to give you,” Peter said quietly. The man’s eyes dropped again. He was ready to start crying out for alms.

“But I have a much better gift,” Peter went on. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!”

As he said this, Peter reached out his hand and lifted the man up to his feet. The man trembled as he stood, but suddenly he felt strength coming into his legs. He took one step forward, then two, then walked about, shouting with joy. Before long he was leaping about as though he had never been crippled.

“Praise God!” he shouted. “Praise God for healing me!”

Imagine how surprised the people in the Temple were when this man ran through the courtyards, shouting and leaping as he went.

“Praise God!” he kept on shouting.

He had expected a coin from Peter and John. But the gift he received was a much better gift! That’s the way God does things when we are willing to receive His better gifts.

Luke 17:11-19

Once upon a time in the days when Jesus lived with fathers and mothers and little children, down the street in a little home lived a mother and a wee baby. One day the father came down with a dreadful sickness. The doctors came, but they could not make him well; for he had a sickness called leprosy. He would never get better, but instead each day the great sores on the father's legs and arms would grow worse. And because the mother and baby and the other people on the street would catch the sickness from him, he must go away and never come back again.

Outside the city in the fields, where no one lived and not many people passed by, he could stay and build himself a little house from stones he found in the road. There were others there with the same sickness. The father could stay with these, but he must never, never touch the mother or the baby again; for if he did, he might give them the sickness, too. So one day, the father said goodbye and went to live alone out in the fields. He could not kiss the baby goodbye. He must not even touch its little hand. Every morning the mother would take a little bowl of soup or something she had cooked that day and leave it with a piece of bread out in the field for the father. She would call to him, and he would come and stand far off and look at her. Then, when she was gone, he would come out and get the food she had left for him and go away.

Often the mother thought of the father out in the fields all alone, in the cold or the rain with no one to take care of him, and she wished, oh, so much that he might come home! And the father, living out in the field day after day, wished so much to see the mother and the baby again.

There were other sick fathers and mothers, too, who lived in the field, and often they would sit and talk together. One day one of them said that particular morning the little boy who had brought his lunch to him had told of a great Doctor who was going down the streets into the homes, making all the sick people well. And yet He was greater than a doctor, because He did things that doctors could not do. He was glad to help mothers and fathers in all sorts of ways. He taught them how to be good, and he took little children into His arms and blessed them. Perhaps this great Doctor would help them, too. But they could not go into the city to find Him, and He might never pass their way. Few people cared to pass along where the sick lepers lived, for they were afraid that they might catch the sickness, too. But this great Friend of mothers and fathers and little children was different, the little boy said. He would come to all who needed Him. The name of the great Doctor, he said, was Jesus.

For many days, the sick lepers talked about Him, wondering if they would ever see Him. One day, as the father sat with nine others on the grass, one of them jumped up with a glad cry. “Look!” he said, pointing down the road. “This must be Jesus. He is coming. He is passing by.” Oh, how gladly they would have run to Him and begged Him to make them well, but they knew that because they had leprosy, they must not go near. So they stood far off and called to Him. “Jesus, do not pass us by; we pray that you will make us well again, so that we can go back to our homes, to the mothers and children.”

There was no sickness or trouble that Jesus could not cure. Gently He spoke to them. “Go into the city, and as you go, you shall be well and strong again.” They started running, and as they went, suddenly they felt the old sickness leaving them. The sores went away. Jesus had made them well. How gladly they ran on toward their homes to see the mothers and children and take them in their arms again.

Only one man turned back. He, too, thought of his wife and baby back home, but first he must find Jesus and thank Him for taking the dreadful sickness away from him.

Jesus was glad that the man came back to say “thank you” but seemed a little sad, as He asked, “But where are the nine others? They were made well, too. Did they forget?” They were so glad to get home to the mothers and babies that they had forgotten to say “thank you” to Jesus, who made them well. Only the one man had remembered. Now with a glad heart, he turned back to go home to be with his family and friends again.

(Luke 10:25-37)

One day a man tried to trick Jesus with some questions. He was an expert on religious law. He wanted Jesus to say the wrong thing about the law so that people would not follow Him.

“What must I do to live forever?” the man asked.

“You should know the answer to that,” Jesus replied. “What do you find in the law?”

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself,” the man replied.

“You have given the right answer to your own question,” Jesus told him. “If you do this, you will live forever.”

But the man still wanted to trick Jesus. So he asked another question.

“Who is my neighbor?” he asked.

Jesus then told this story to answer the man’s question:

“One of our own Jewish men was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes and money, beat him up, and left him half dead by the road.

“Not long after that, one of our own priests came along the road. When he saw this injured man lying there, he passed by on the other side of the road. Then a Levite, who helps in our Jewish religious work, came by. He took one look at the poor man, then went on his way.

“After that, a Samaritan came down the road. As you know, you people all hate the Samaritans. But when he saw this poor man lying beside the road, he felt sorry for him. He knelt down, put some medicine on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he laid the man carefully on his donkey and took him to an inn.

“The Samaritan stayed with this poor injured man until he was sure that he was all right. The next day he gave the innkeeper two coins, worth two days’ wages, and told him to take care of the man while he was gone.

“If you must spend more to get this fellow well, I will pay you when I return,” the Samaritan told the innkeeper.”

When Jesus had finished His story, He looked at the expert in Jewish law, who had tried to trick Him.

“Which of these three men was a good neighbor to the injured man?”

“The one who was kind to him and helped him,” the man answered.

“Then you must go and be that kind of neighbor too,” Jesus told him.

(1 Samuel 1–3)

For years, Hannah had been praying for a son. Then one day she promised God that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord to serve Him all his life. Within a year Hannah gave birth to a son; she named him Samuel.

When Samuel was three years old, Hannah presented him to Eli, the priest, and said, “For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted my petition. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be lent to the Lord.” So Samuel remained with Eli, who taught him to minister to the Lord in the temple, and every year his mother came to visit him.

It was several years later when, one night after Samuel had gone to bed, the Lord called to him. Thinking it was Eli calling, Samuel answered, “Here I am;” and ran to see Eli. But Eli said “I didn’t call; lie down again.” And so he did. Then the Lord called Samuel again, and he went in to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Again, Eli said he did not call and told Samuel to go lie down.

After Samuel went back to bed, the Lord called him a third time. And Samuel rose and went to Eli and said “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who spoke, and he told Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if He calls you, say, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant hears.’”

Samuel did lie down again, and the Lord came and stood, and called as before, “Samuel, Samuel.” And Samuel answered, “Speak; for your servant hears.” And the Lord spoke to him and revealed the troubles that would come against the home of Eli because of Eli’s evil sons.

As Samuel awoke the next morning and fulfilled his duties, he was afraid to tell Eli about the vision that the Lord had given him because he didn’t want to hurt the old man. But soon Eli called Samuel, and he responded, “Here I am,” and went in to see him. Eli asked, “What did the Lord say to you? Please don’t hide it from me.” And Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him.

“It is the Lord,” said Eli; “Let Him do what seems good to Him.”

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and all of Israel knew that Samuel was destined to be a prophet of the Lord.

(Luke 15:11-24)

A certain father had two sons, and the youngest of them was not content with living at home. This young man was sure he could do better for himself out in the world, on his own, and he was eager to leave his family to begin a new life.

One day he said to his father, "Father, give me the part of your inheritance that belongs to me." Fulfilling his son's request, the father divided his belongings and gave the young man his share.

Several days later, the son had gathered all his belongings and left home to live as he wished. He traveled a long distance, into another country. There he became involved in a riotous, wild lifestyle that seemed pleasurable to him for the time.

But as time passed, the son's money and supply of goods began to run low, and there was no one to give him any more. Still he continued in his sinful, reckless way of living until the day when he had nothing left, and his clothing, was rags. Moreover, there was a terrible famine in the land, and it was difficult to find food. Neither did he have a place to live or a bed for rest.

He needed to work, but work was hard to find. Eventually a man gave him a job, feeding pigs. The son was so hungry, he willingly would have eaten the corn husks he was feeding to the pigs, but they were not offered to him. One day, in desolation, the young man realized that even his father's servants had plenty to eat and some left over while he himself was starving. He decided to go back to his father and ask forgiveness for all he had done, and he left the faraway country and headed for home.

While he was still a distance from the house, the father saw his son and ran to him, hugging and kissing him and welcoming him home.

"I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son," the young man said.

But the father called for his servants to bring clean clothes, the very best robe, and shoes for his son's feet and a ring for his hand. Then the father planned a welcome celebration. "For my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found," he said.

And just as the father rejoiced over the return of his lost son, our Heavenly Father rejoices over a lost soul that comes to Him.

Acts 16:16-40

One Sabbath morning two men named Paul and Silas were in a city called Philippi. There was no church building there, but they looked for a place where people were worshiping God. Down on the banks of the river, they found some Jewish women who met there every Sabbath to pray. As his custom was, Paul talked to them about the Lord Jesus. A woman named Lydia believed Paul's message and became a Christian. As Paul was a stranger in the city, Lydia insisted that he make her house his home while he was there.

Now in that town lived a young woman who was not in her right mind. She could talk in such a queer way that the people who worshiped idols said that the gods spoke through her. They could come to find out what was going to happen to them in the future, or get her to tell them where to find things that they had lost. When they came to her, she would have a spell of some kind, and mumble queer things, and then the men who owned her—for she was a slave girl—would pretend to know what she meant and would tell the people. Everyone who came had to pay something, so the girl's masters made a great deal of money.

One day this girl saw Paul and his companions, and in some way the girl knew that these men were different from others. She followed them along the street, screaming out: "These men are servants of the Most High God. They proclaim the way of salvation." Day after day this happened until finally one day Paul turned and commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. Immediately, she was healed. No longer did she mumble strange sayings. But when her masters saw how she was, they knew that she could no longer make money for them. They were furious. How dare this man do this thing! So they attacked Paul and Silas and began to stir up the people against them.

Now Philippi was not a Jewish city, and the Jews were not well liked because they seemed strange to people who worshiped the heathen gods. So these men said: "These Jews are coming here and making trouble for our city, and they are saying things against our laws." In a little while they stirred up a mob that seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the rulers of the city. Without waiting for a trial, without giving Paul and Silas an opportunity to say a word, the rulers commanded that the two men be beaten with rods and thrown into prison. They ordered the jailer to guard them well. The command was obeyed, and with backs bleeding from the terrible blows, Paul and Silas were put into the inner prison, and their feet were fastened in the stocks.

Night came, but Paul and Silas couldn't sleep. Their backs were raw and bleeding, and with their feet in such an uncomfortable position, sleep was impossible. The cell was dark and damp. They were in great trouble. After a while Paul and Silas began singing hymns and praying in their prison cell.

Suddenly at midnight their singing stopped. A great earthquake shook the building, and strange things happened. The prison doors swung open, but the prisoners were too frightened to escape. The jailer thought they had gone. He was about to kill himself, because in those days the jailer would be killed if his prisoners escaped. But as he drew his sword, a voice called through the darkness, "Don't harm yourself, for we are all here." It was Paul and Silas talking, and the jailer couldn't believe it. He called for a light and sprang into the jail to see whether it was so. And it was! He dropped on his knees before the two men, his prisoners, and said: "What must I do to be saved?" And they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The jailer believed and was baptized. Then he washed the wounds of Paul and Silas and gave them food.

The story traveled fast. When the rulers of the town heard it, they were frightened, and early in the morning they sent word to the jailer that the men were to be set free. But Paul and Silas had not been tried in a fair way, and Paul wasn't going to sneak off. He said: "If the rulers want us to go, they can come and take us out so that people will know that they set us free." The rulers did come, and they asked the men to leave not only the prison but the town as well. After spending a short time in Lydia's home, talking to the Christians, Paul and Silas left Philippi to go to another city to tell the people about Jesus.

No doubt the jailer became a member of the church that Paul and Silas had started at Philippi. Many years later, Paul wrote a beautiful letter to that church. Today, you can read it in your Bible. It is called the letter to the Philippians.

(Mark 2:13-15)

People whispered when they saw Levi walking to work. They frowned as they watched him sit down at his booth by the Sea of Galilee.

Levi was a tax collector. He worked for the Romans, and the Romans ruled Levi's people, the Jews. Many hated him. He charged more than he should and kept much for himself, as most tax collectors did. Levi's only friends were the other tax collectors. None of his neighbors would invite him to dinner or go to his house to eat.

Levi had one other friend. His name was Jesus. Whenever Jesus walked by Levi's booth, He stopped to talk. He may often have told Levi how God loved him and why He had come to earth and how Levi could follow Him. Levi always listened carefully to Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus. But he would have to give up his job, which brought him much money. He also wondered if his tax collector friends would stop being his friends. Levi always had some weak excuse for not following Jesus. Sometimes he would say, "Tomorrow," but by the next day it was even harder to leave his well-paying job and his friends.

One day Levi saw Jesus coming. He came straight up to Levi's tax booth. He smiled and greeted Levi and looked into his eyes.

"Follow Me!" Jesus said.

Levi's heart began to pound. What excuse could he give today? How could he leave this well-paying job? What would his friends say if he did? Would they stop being his friends? Suddenly he realized that it was much more important to follow Jesus and be His friend. Without a word, Levi put the money away. He closed up his tax booth. Someone else could work for the Romans now!

Then Levi looked at his tax collector friends, who by this time had gathered closer to see what he was doing. "I'm going to follow Jesus from now on," he told them. "I want you to keep on being my friends. And I want you to be Jesus' friends, too."

Levi invited all his friends to his house for dinner. He also invited Jesus. Perhaps He could talk with them and help them follow Him. Levi knew that he would follow Jesus even if his friends stopped being his friends.

The people in the crowd certainly looked surprised as they saw Levi and Jesus walking together toward Levi's house. They were even more surprised as they saw Levi's tax collector friends going in, too.

The tax booth looked strange and empty now. Levi had found something—someone—far more important than that.

Luke 1: 26-45

One day God sent His angel Gabriel down to the home of an Israelite girl named Mary. “I have a very important message for you from God,” the angel said. “The Lord God has blessed you above all women.”

But when Mary saw the angel and heard him speak to her, she was frightened! So the angel said, “Do not be afraid, Mary. God has chosen you to be the mother of His Son. You shall give Him the name Jesus. He will be very great and will rule over Israel forever.”

“But I do not understand,” said Mary. “Joseph and I are not yet married.”

The angel announced, “With God nothing is impossible.”

When Mary heard this, she bowed her head. “I am very happy to be the servant of God,” she said, “Whatever He wants me to do, I will do it gladly.”

“There is also happy news for your cousin, Elizabeth,” said the angel. “Even though she is old, she too will have a baby son.” Then, just as suddenly as he had come, the angel disappeared.

Mary was happy and excited, but she was worried, too. If she told people what had happened, would anyone believe her? “I know what I’ll do,” Mary thought, “I’ll go and visit my cousin Elizabeth. She is very wise. And she will be as excited as I am, for she has given up all hope of ever having a baby of her own.”

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice outside the door, she ran to meet her. “Mary!” she cried. “I know all about your baby! Just think, my own cousin was chosen to be the mother of God’s Son!”

“How I thank God for choosing me!” Mary said. “Do you know, an angel came and brought me the good news. Did an angel come to you, too?”

“No,” said Elizabeth. “But an angel did come to see my husband, Zechariah. He told Zechariah that we would have a baby son. We are to name him John. He will tell people to get ready because God’s Son—for whom we have waited so long—is coming at last!”

“I’m sure Zechariah was very happy to hear this,” said Mary.

“Zechariah couldn’t believe it,” Elizabeth answered. “He asked the angel to give him a sign. The angel told him that he would not be able to speak until the day the baby is born. So Zechariah cannot talk, but now he does believe. And he is just as happy and excited as I am.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. But finally the time came for her to go back home.

“I am so happy for you, Elizabeth,” Mary said as she left. “You thought you were too old to be a mother. But now your greatest wish is coming true.”

“Yes,” said Elizabeth, “God has greatly blessed us both. But you, Mary, are the most blessed, for your baby is the Son of God!”