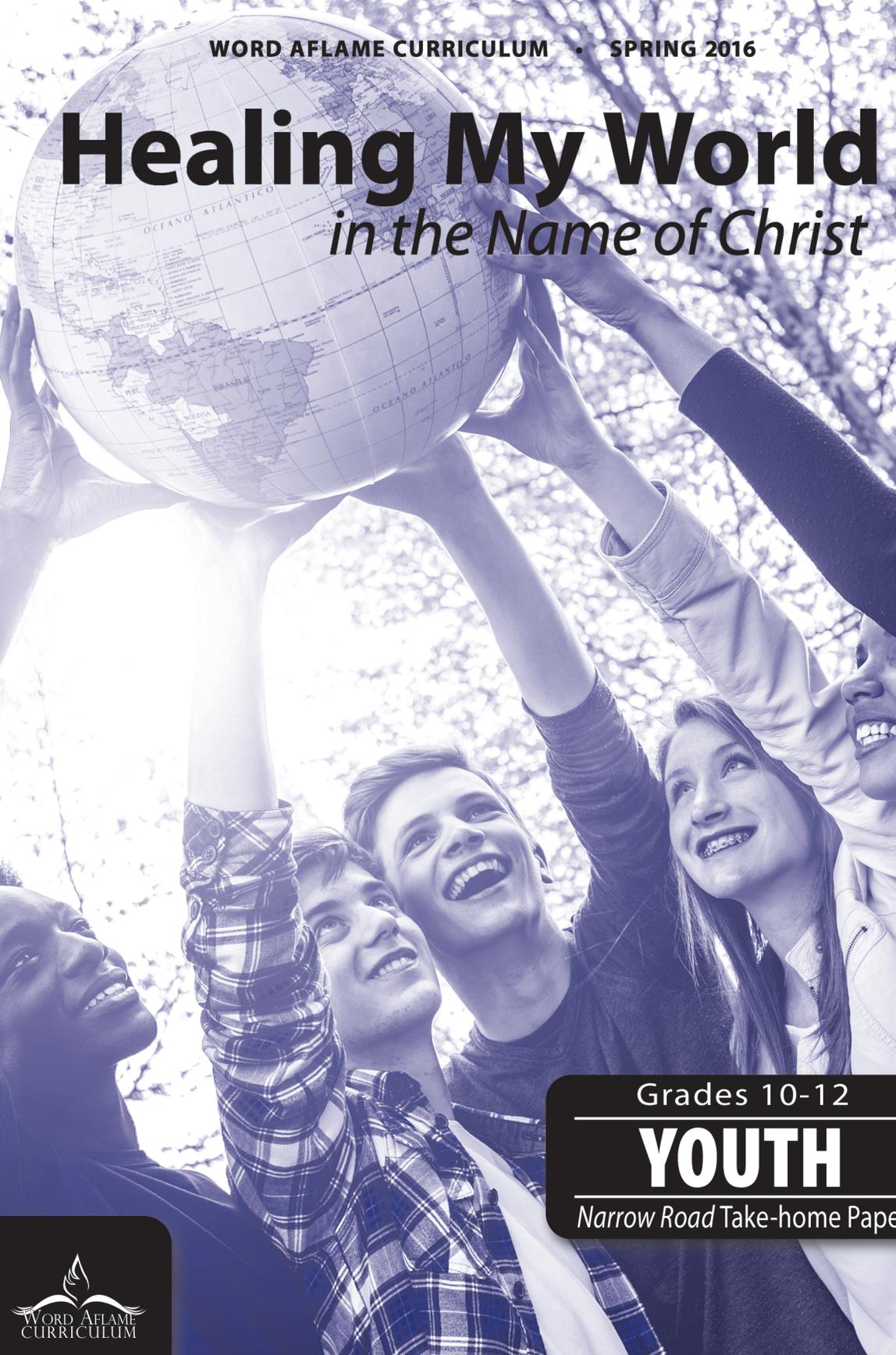


WORD AFLAME CURRICULUM • SPRING 2016

Healing My World

in the Name of Christ



Grades 10-12

YOUTH

Narrow Road Take-home Paper



Narrow Road/Youth Take-home SPRING 2016

Associate Editor, Curriculum: Lee Ann Alexander • Student Editor: Evan Zenobia

Design: Chris Anderson, Elizabeth Loyd • Art: Kat Moyou

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Pesach Stories

Passover in Bethany

by Ann Frake



This story emphasizes the theme of lesson 1: "Calvary Is All about the Ultimate Sacrifice."

I know I'm new to the village, but something is not right next door. I have been watching and watching, but no one has fed or watered the lamb out back.

"Here I come, little white lamb. Ruth Esther has some milk."

I have goat's milk in a skin and he sucks on it happily, tail twirling. He is smart and recognizes me after six days. I come over and pet him all the time. I helped give him a bath the first day Mary the redhead bought him, and we examined every inch of him. He is perfect. I was working with water, anyway, so what was one more thing to wash?

I knock on the Marys' door, but no one is home.

I go back to our kitchen to make the unleavened bread for the Passover Feast tonight and Sabbath tomorrow. I'm not a good cook, but I can make bread.

I use cold water and *kemach shel matza shamura*, which is flour that has been watched from the moment of harvest to the moment of packing to make sure it has not come into contact with any moisture. This is so that it will not ferment. Leavening or fermentation is like sin, and it is the enemy of Passover week.

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YOUTH
March 13, 2016



We do not use our regular clay oven in the backyard because we bake braided Challah there the rest of the year. Instead, we have a special, temporary pit to cook over this week, which has a new tile to the side, one that has never had any rising bread on it. All utensils used must be boiled for Passover. We even have twelve new wooden plates for this week.

Last night my father “searched” the house for *chametz* or leaven, about an hour after sunset. He carried a feather to brush out the corners of the house and a lighted candle. Mother hid three crumbs of old Challah bread in a napkin and left it on the floor in the corner of my bedroom so that he would have something to “find” and burn while saying the special blessing this morning.

I measure one part water and three parts flour onto a cotton cloth. The second the moisture hits the flour, I must hurry. There must be no more than a few minutes from the time the water is mixed with the flour until the time the dough is put onto the hot oven tile.

I quickly mix and knead the dough into balls and roll it out as thin as possible. I use my fingers to pinch holes all around the bread, until it looks like lace. I place the rounds on the hot tile for two to three minutes, flipping when one side becomes golden with brown freckles.

My family has just moved to

Bethany this year, behind the Marys: Mary the old and Mary the redhead. The Marys are not sisters nor mother and daughter. We can tell because they are always polite and nice to each other, never arguing. They are also new to the village, arriving only months before we did, so it seems natural that we've all become friends.

I am the only child in my family, and still at home at eighteen, when I should be married. So, since I have no home of my own, I do the cleaning, or *kashering*, with my mother this week before Passover begins.

So much to do! We carry the kitchen table outside and scrub it, then pour boiling water over it, again and again. We pour boiling water over the jars and knives. We scrub with sand, never animal fat soap.

In fact, I've boiled enough water—to over the backyard fire—to clean the whole neighborhood. My hair is kinky from the humidity. My mother takes one look at me and makes clucking noises. She thinks I will never get married. Arrangements have been made twice, but I am poor, tall, skinny, and have the tongue of a viper, to quote the last disaster.

"This is your father's fault!" my mother rails. "Giving you books and teaching you like a son."

My father taught boys in the Temple school and we share a love of debate, law, and anything controversial. That is why we had to move to Bethany. He lost his job, being controversial.

Our neighbors are controversial. The older Mary's son is *very* controversial. My father is *very* interested in him. All of Jerusalem is interested in him.

His name is Jesus, and people call him the prophet from Nazareth. He is supposed to heal people and throw demons out of the possessed. My father has been follow-

ing up on the stories and interviewing the people who were healed. I think he's been surprised by the results.

Simon the Leper was healed; there is no doubt about that. Everyone in Bethany knows Simon; he's lived here all his life. He is as tall as I am, although ten years older. He was going to get married when the leprosy hit him. He is now healed, but she married a money-changer in Jerusalem.

The rabbi who lives in Bethany examined Simon after he was healed and promptly sent him off to the big Temple for further study. They could not find a scar or a mark of the disease anywhere. That was the first big red flag for Jerusalem's crooked religious leaders.

Simon can't stop talking about Jesus. He even talks to me, and always calls out my name, Ruth Esther. It sounds better when he says it.

I am worried. I've never met older Mary's son, but he caused a lot of talk during the past week, making quite an entrance into Jerusalem. I guess the poor people threw their coats in front of his donkey as he rode in, and waved palm branches while crying "Hosanna!" The priests from the Temple hated it, since they never get a warm welcome anywhere. They tried to start rumors about a prostitute who poured spikenard on Jesus' feet at Simon's Shabbat dinner, here in Bethany. But it was not a prostitute, it was our friend Martha's younger sister. Everyone in Bethany knows her for the gentle soul she is, so the story died out quickly.

I am worried for both of the Marys next door. I know how vindictive the Temple leaders can be, firing my father because he questioned the kickbacks associated with the diseased animals sold in the Temple for clean sacrifices. How he laughed when he

heard about Jesus overturning the money-changer's tables and using a whip on the men who had used their whips on the sick sheep that they herded through the Temple courts.

I worry because those powerful religious leaders strike out at anyone who threatens their authority. We have heard that Jesus was arrested last night.

Where are the Marys? This white lamb was supposed to go to the Temple this morning with all the others, to be slaughtered during the ninth hour of the day. My family goes in with two widows to share a lamb. Father picked that gray lamb up from the widows' house and left an hour ago.

Food is important. After sunset tonight, there can be no more cooking, so Mother and I plan the Sabbath meal as well as the Passover Feast tonight. The fire is blazing but will have to die down to white embers before

we put the freshly slaughtered meat near it. I have two freshly cleaned hens that will be added, and they will serve us tomorrow for our dinner.

Our fire is surrounded by mounded rocks and sand, up to my knees. It is a U-shaped earthen mound that will protect the fire from the wind and help focus the heat. Outside the U are supports for the spit. The dressed lamb is skewered onto a six-foot branch of olive wood that we cut two weeks ago. The carcass is then turned on the edge of the fire, which is behind the spit, not under it. We catch the drippings in a wooden bowl because they are wonderful and we don't want a grease fire under the meat.

The curly lamb, tied in back of the Marys' house, can see the fire. I move him to the other side of the yard, out of sight.

Where are the Marys?

(to be continued)



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Pesach Stories

Passover Preparations

by Ann Frake



**This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 2:
“Witnesses to the Crucifixion.”**

Who is in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, preparing for a Passover dinner, and not at the Crucifixion?

My father arrives, carrying the carcass of a lamb. Not the frisky, white one that I’ve been petting all week at the Marys’ house, but a small gray one that was purchased for this dinner and kept at the two widows’ house

with whom we share the meal. My parents learned about eleven years ago when I was still seven that they could not keep a lamb at our house and then eat it.

That was the year I hid the lamb and tried to take him back to his flock. Mother and Father were frantic. I was missing all night, but the lamb never got eaten.

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YOUTH
March 20, 2016

“Ruth Esther!” my father said in exasperation. “Never, never do that, again!”

“This is your father’s fault!” my mother cried. “He taught you to read and treats you like a boy!”

“A shepherd boy?” I asked, and promptly got spanked after their long night of fear for my safety.

My father got one of his old Levite friends at the Temple in Jerusalem to butcher the lamb very early today, so that he could avoid the priests who fired him. So many good men still work at the Temple, but so many greedy ones, too. And they are in power.

He and I work in our backyard setting up the spit, rubbing the meat’s skin with olive oil and garlic, and sewing lemons and onions into the body cavity.

When we are done, he motions me into the kitchen and closes the door. He pulls Mother over and speaks in a hushed voice.

“The Marys and their friends are in Jerusalem. There was an illegal trial last night—Annas and Caiaphas are up to their old tricks. They arrested the older Mary’s son, Jesus, and then brought him before the Sanhedrin early this morning. The Marys got word in the night and went to Jerusalem before it was light this morning.”

Jesus’ mother lives in the house behind us, with Mary of Magdalene, also known as Mary the redhead, to distinguish one from the other.

“I saw their lamb, still tied up, and wondered where they’d gone,” I tell him. “Do their friends Lazarus and Martha know? What about Simon?”

“They all know, but Simon stayed in Bethany. He says that he needs to buy some things before sundown.”

Mother is adamant, saying, “What? We will share our lamb!”

“Yes, if they come back tonight. But he was not preparing food. Simon was buying cloth and preparing funeral spices and oils.”

“I don’t understand. Jesus has done nothing worthy of execution, Father.”

“I know, Ruth Esther. The Sanhedrin sent him on to Pilate, who couldn’t find anything. So, Pilate bounced him to Herod, who is in Jerusalem this week.”

“That one,” Mother sniffs with contempt.

“Herod wanted to see Jesus. He was hoping to see one of the miracles, but Jesus was silent through all the questioning, so Herod returned him to Pilate.”

“Poor Mary. Is she following from court to court in the crowd?”

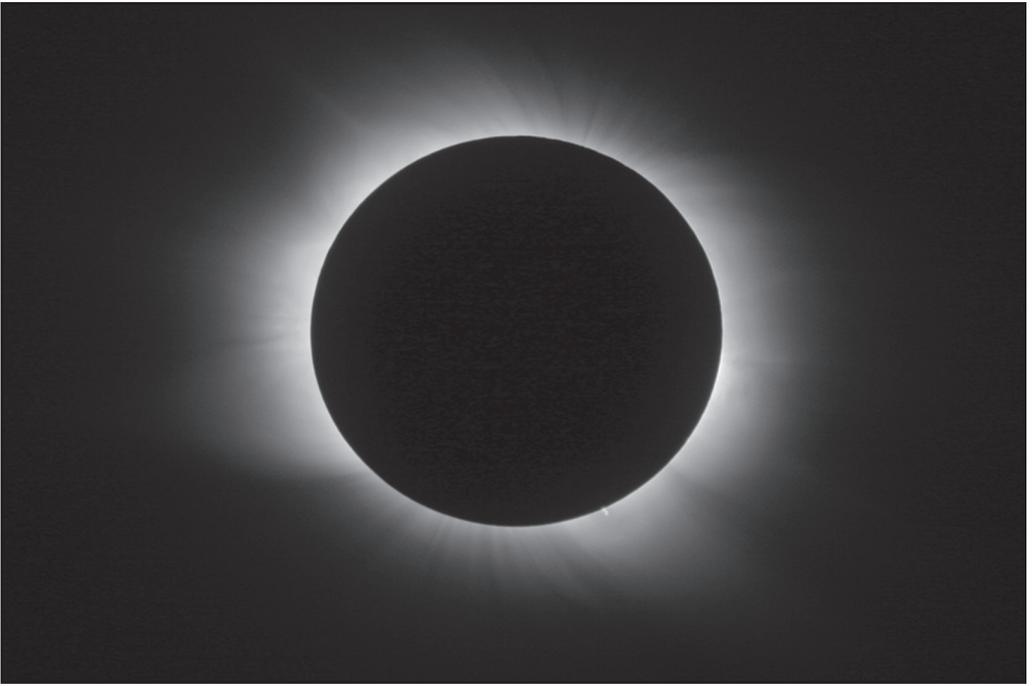
“I hope not,” Father says. “That was a very rough crowd, and I didn’t recognize most of their faces. I think the priests brought them in from out of town, at least the ones riling up the crowd.”

“Most of the people adore him!” I wail, getting too loud, as I think about their loud “Hosannas!” less than a week ago.

“Shh, Ruth Esther, keep your voice down. When I passed the edge of the crowd around Pilate’s balcony, I could smell the liquor being passed around, even though it is only the fifth hour of the day. I imagine those drinking skins have some Temple marks on them, as Annas and Caiaphas try to fuel a riot.”

My mother is shaking her head. “Surely they don’t mean to crucify him today? There are thieves that are supposed to be crucified. Isn’t there supposed to be more time between the trial and a death sentence?” she said. “It cannot even be the sixth hour, yet, can it?”

I open the kitchen door to see. My father glances up at the sun, and then glances again. We walk out into the yard. He holds out the prayer cloth on his belt and the round holes in the hem cast their



shadows on the hard dirt. The little circles of light are not quite right and they are changing before our eyes.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

My father shakes his head from side to side. He does not know.

The sky is becoming dark and an eerie twilight begins to descend, although it is the highest point of the sun. Waves of shadow rush rapidly from horizon to horizon. I look up and see the moon, merging slowly into the sun.

Birds stop singing and some flower blossoms begin to close as if for the night. Bees stop buzzing around the fig tree. It is oddly hushed on this most busy day.

People have come away from their Passover preparations to stand in the street and watch. I also watch as I tend the roasting lamb. My father is in the house, searching his scrolls and books for mention of this phenomenon. My mother

works in the kitchen, now expecting the Marys and the widows and perhaps even the older Mary’s friends for Passover dinner. Besides, cooking is what mother does best when she is upset. I am also making more bread on my tile next to the lamb. I have made stacks and stacks. We will have enough for days and days. I am worried, and it shows.

One of our neighbors, coming back from Jerusalem, tells us that there has been a crucifixion, but he thinks it was three thieves, including the notorious Barabbas.

But my father shakes his head. He has heard another story that Barabbas was released to the crowd.

The edges of the moon seem to be strung with shiny beads of light.

When a single point of sunlight remains it flashes like a jewel against the outline of the moon. This final sparkling vanishes and the sun is blocked, but a faint corona of

gold, like a crown, can be seen.

I am frightened at the swift and dramatic nighttime effect. The sky near the horizon still appears bright, and this distant scattered light produces a slight reddish glow and unusual shadow effects. This daytime darkness is not quite as black as at night, but its startling onset and unearthly appearance make me uneasy. The darkness resembles nighttime, and animals react accordingly, dropping their heads. The temperature cools in the moon's shadow. All of nature seems still and quiet for this daytime darkness. It is only the ninth hour of the day.

The meat, sizzling over the fire, starts to shake and move as if it is alive. I step back, startled and realize all the clay jars are wobbling against our wall. The earth is shuddering.

My parents come running out of the house. Animals around the village begin making noise, coming abruptly awake. Then the yelling and running seems to be coming from all directions.

The world must certainly be ending. The stars in the sky are visible, but it does not last. A ray of sunlight bursts out from the dark pupil in the sun's eye as the sky lightens slightly. The moon is still moving.

We end up standing in the garden, tending the spit for another two hours, watching the sun reemerge, and people walk to and from Jerusalem. Many of the people are crying. I just stand there and pray. Finally Simon comes and we all go back into the house. I have the little white lamb on a rope, and will not let it go. I tie it

outside our door. Simon just nods.

There are aftershocks, but the house seems stable. There is some damage but the roof does not seem to be coming down around our heads.

Simon has heard that it was Jesus, not Barabbas, who was crucified.

"I bought the burial spices, but I didn't think we would really need them," he explains, tears running down his face. "I was just doing what his mother asked me to do. I never thought Jesus would really be crucified."

Also, he's heard reports of graves heaving open and the dead walking into Jerusalem. My parents look shocked and horrified.

"What about the Marys?" Father asks.

"I'm going into Jerusalem, now," Simon tells us, "to try to find them and get them back here before sundown."

"You only have two more hours," my father reminds him.

"Everyone can eat here tonight," my mother instructs. "Food is important after a shock."

Simon nods. He will also be looking for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, the siblings, in Jerusalem.

"Simon, I'm sorry," I tell him as he leaves. "I know how much you loved Jesus."

"How could I do anything but love him, Ruth Esther? He changed everything in my life," Simon the Leper whispers as he looks at his hands, now perfect and healthy, and holding my own in a friend's loose clasp.

(to be continued)



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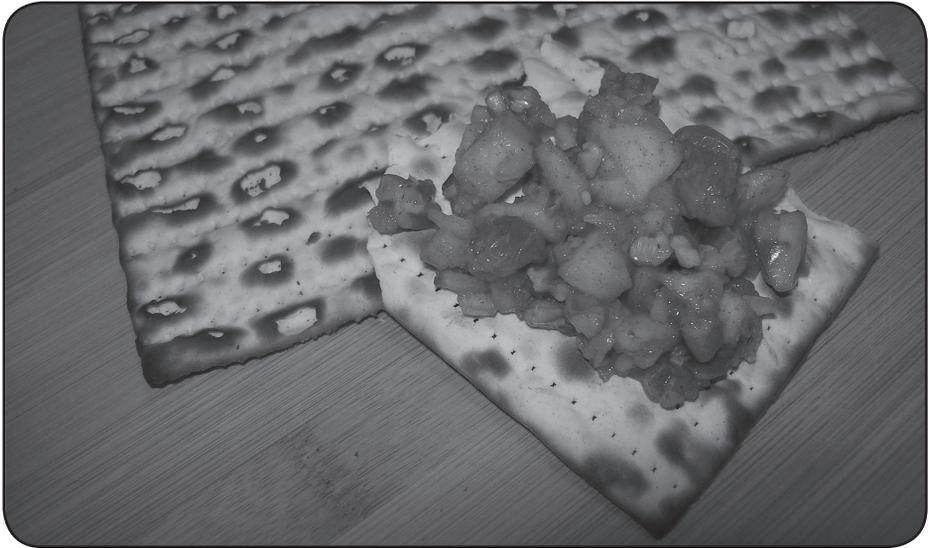
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Pesach Stories

The Day In-Between

by Ann Frake



**This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 3:
"Sharing the Good News."**

The morning after the crucifixion brought some blessed numbness.

"Eat something," Mary Magdalene, the redhead said. "Food is important."

The last thing on earth the older Mary wanted was food. And yet, here was her Sabbath and Passover food, in abundance, uneaten and soon to be spoiling.

"You had almost nothing to eat yesterday, and tomorrow we'll be working with the body."

The body? His body! Mary noticed that everyone avoided saying her son's name.

The *haroset* was in the first jar she uncovered. The ground almonds, walnuts, and pistachios with dried fruit would be sweet and easy to eat. She took a wooden knife and spread the lumpy brown concoction on a piece of unleavened bread. It was supposed to look like the mortar used by the Israelite slaves when they were in Egyptian bondage. Today it seemed to

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actually taste like mortar, too. She had trouble swallowing more than a bite and carried her stiff bread to the back door, throwing out the remainder to the lively Passover lamb tied to the fig tree. He should be dead. He was supposed to be slaughtered yesterday, not her son.

Her mind went back to yesterday's ninth hour when she'd asked the other women, "Is Jesus dead?" He was. She couldn't watch him dying, but couldn't leave, either. Not until it was done. Then she could not look at him enough. They let her hold his broken, limp body for a few minutes before taking him away, again, forever.

Mary looked at the kitchen table. There was a bowl of boiled eggs, still shelled, submerged in water to keep them fresh. *No saltwater is needed to symbolize the Israelite slaves' tears this Passover week, she thought, I've brought my own.* She pushed the bowl aside, looking for the spices and oils purchased and prepared by Simon, by her own instructions, before sundown last night. She checked them with thoroughness.

The sticky aloe and balsam resin held the pulverized calamus, cinnamon cassia, galbanum, and spikenard that would be an additional seal over the corpse's winding linen. There seemed to be a lot of it. With firm hands, she covered the jar again.

She went to a small chest in her room, opened it, and dug out a sealed jar from the bottom. She'd saved it all these years. The gold had been spent to get into Egypt, the incense used to trade for food on the same trip, but she'd kept the myrrh.

Mary had heard that Joseph of Arimathea had already anointed Jesus' body with oils and spices, but she was his mother and was certainly going to take care of her own son. It would take more than mere soldiers to stop her tomorrow.

A soft knocking at the door made Mary look up. Tall and skinny, Ruth Esther was there, carrying a jar of grape juice.

"My mother sent this over for your Sabbath dinner today."

"Ruth Esther! Thank you, your mother was wonderful to have all of us last night."

Mary took a deep sniff of the fresh, familiar saturated juice that the cask held.

"Ruth Esther, have I ever told you the story of the wedding at Cana? It's one of my favorites about Jesus."

"Please tell me, Mary," Ruth Esther sat down in the kitchen. She had a kind heart and knew that the older Mary needed to talk about her son.

"It was more than three years ago; we'd gone to the wedding of my close friend's daughter. I was helping; there's always so much to do at a wedding supper." Mary looked at Ruth Esther and realized that the girl wouldn't know firsthand. "Your wedding supper will be like that, Ruth Esther, but Mary and I will help, and of course, Martha, too. You can't beat that one off with a stick if there's work to do," the older Mary smiled gently.

Ruth Esther frowned; surely Mary should be wailing today, not teasing about her friends and their idiosyncrasies.

"You know that I probably won't have a wedding supper," Ruth Esther said.

Mary the older clucked her tongue. "Simon watches you like a hawk. I would be very surprised if he doesn't like you. He's a good man, too. And smart," she said. "You need to marry a man who is at least as smart as you. I wish you could have met my Joseph. He was a carpenter, but so bright."

"Jesus' father," Ruth Esther affirmed.

"Oh, no! Not Jesus' father. He was the father of all the others, but not Jesus," Mary said. "I was a virgin and engaged to Joseph when an angel visited me and talked to me. I was terrified."

"An angel?" Ruth Esther almost



yelped her surprise. “What did he say?”

“Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.”

“Oh,” Ruth Esther’s eyes were wide.

“Ruth Esther, Jesus did not have an earthly father,” Mary said. “He was God, becoming flesh, living inside a human body.”

“That’s why he could do miracles?” Ruth Esther whispered.

“Yes, and the angels said that my old Aunt Elisabeth, barren her whole marriage, was expecting a child, also, and she was! That was John the Baptist’s mother, Jesus’ cousin. Did you ever meet him?”

“No, but what did Joseph say?”

“He was kind,” the older Mary sighed. “That was worse than if he’d accused me of being a liar. He was a bit older than I was, and I think he was afraid that . . .

well, never mind. I could see he was hurt, but still so kind. He was going to send me to some of his relatives to have the baby, out of Nazareth, but then an angel appeared to him, too. I felt a lot better, then, and so did he.”

“And your parents?” Ruth Esther asked, knowing how appalled and humiliated her family would be in that situation.

“Just my mother was left, and not in good health,” Mary explained. “She wasn’t able to travel with me to see Elisabeth. And she cried when I told her about the baby coming. I don’t think she was worried about the child as much as she was worried that perhaps I had gone mad with guilt and was delusional. But she believed when she finally saw the baby, John. Elisabeth was a much older sister, and John’s birth was a miracle.”

The older Mary could not be stopped. Ruth Esther sat and listened to stories of mangers and angel choirs, shepherds and

wise men, and even the search for twelve-year-old Jesus. By the time she'd finished with the wedding miracle at Cana, Mary had Ruth Esther smiling, too.

"Oh, Jesus was not happy when I called the servants and told them to do anything he asked. He gave me that long look that all children give their mothers, and then went ahead and did a miracle. What a child I had! He was always doing the unexpected," Mary beamed.

A silence followed as the two women thought of his death.

Mary shook herself and said, "I am still expecting the unexpected. I am not the only one. That is why they have posted a guard at his tomb."

Ruth Esther was aghast, "They posted a guard?"

"And sealed the stone shut," she said. "They are afraid, and they should be. He is God, become flesh. Do you understand, Ruth Esther?"

"I am beginning to understand, Mary. My father has tried to interview as many people as he could find who were healed

by your son. He says that the evidence is building up and he has not found any charlatans. Your son . . . Jesus, he really did heal them and change them."

Mary sat down suddenly and tears sprang to her eyes, "Sometimes my faith is strong, and sometimes I feel despair. I held him in my arms in that horrible place, Golgotha, but there was no life left."

Ruth Esther hugged the older Mary and led her into bed for a rest. Ruth Esther quietly left the house, a million startling thoughts going through her mind. The white lamb caught her attention with his twirling tail.

"I think you must be the most fortunate lamb in the world. No one eats you and everyone feeds you," Ruth Esther said, passing him a piece of fig, as she went to find her father and tell him about Mary's story.

(to be continued)



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Pesach Stories

The Bitter Taste of Failure

by Ann Frake



This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 4: “Gideon: Using Faith to Overcome Cowardice.”

Simon the Leper was healed by Jesus more than a year ago, and he was a leper no more, although the name stuck. His skin went from boils and sores to even, soft smoothness. His world went from hopeless despair to ecstatic joy. Jesus was the reason, and now he was dead. He’d been crucified yesterday, and Simon was functioning in a state of shock, just like everyone else who had followed and loved the Lord.

Simon lived in Bethany, near Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The Marys had recently moved to Bethany, too. Mary Magdalene, a wealthy, middle-aged woman, had purchased a small house for her and the older Mary, Jesus’ mother. Simon was going to fetch the Marys at the sixth hour to escort them to Lazarus and Martha’s house for this sad Sabbath dinner. Mary Magdalene, commonly referred to as Mary the red-head, opened the door.

“Simon, she’s asleep, finally. Be very quiet. She goes back and forth between weeping and happy memories of her son. She’s absolutely

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exhausted and I'm not going to wake her. I'll come out here with you," she told him.

Simon nodded. He took a bench where he could see Ruth Esther's house next door. He hoped she would come outside.

He felt crushed by Jesus' death yesterday, and there was no relief. The Passover meal had been a poignant event of sorrow last night, especially since the death angel had not passed over but had taken the best, the healer, the teacher, the very center of Simon's world.

He looked at Mary Magdalene in the sunshine and realized that her red hair was turning very gray. She was his own mother's age, and she talked to him as if he was twelve years old. It didn't bother him. Much.

"Simon, did you see Peter yesterday, anywhere?"

"No. Why?"

"I didn't see him at all, although they say he cut off one man's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane, two nights ago."

"Was he arrested, too?" Simon asked.

"No, Jesus picked up the ear and healed it instantly."

* * * * *

Outside of Jerusalem, Peter awoke under olive trees and tried to remember where he was. He was in the garden. He groaned. Not again?

He couldn't stay out of this garden. He'd come here the night before last, wanting to hide from everyone in his shame. He'd crashed about the young olive trees, sobbing and crying until falling over from exhaustion. His dreams had been full of self-loathing and Jesus' words: "Thou shalt deny me thrice." "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" "Put up again thy sword."

He tore himself away from Jesus after those words, running off, out of this Gar-

den of Gethsemane, angry that he could do nothing to prevent the soldiers from taking the Lord. He followed from afar, thinking of a rescue.

But it was impossible at the high priest's house with guards everywhere. So, instead of a gallant effort, he hid, watching on the porch. He denied Jesus over and over, trying to remain under cover, to a group of observant girls. His temper finally gave way under all the stress and he showed them, as he cursed and swore.

He thought it could not get any worse, but he was wrong. Now, the second night of sleeping here under the trees had added the crucifixion images and sounds to his nightmares.

He'd hidden from John, as he stood watching the horror. He'd hidden from the Marys and the other followers who were standing further away. He'd watched his precious friend die from the hidden shadows of Golgotha. Then he'd run away and this garden was where he'd finished running, determined to pray all night. But he still couldn't stay awake here, and he still could not force the prayers from his lips. He was worse than a leper. He had betrayed his dearest friend—all of his friends, really.

Peter was prone, his face in the dirt, the adrenaline and energy of fear gone, leaving nothing but despair.

"Peter, eat something," a familiar voice said. It was his brother Andrew.

"I'm not Peter, the rock, anymore. Call me Simon."

"No, I don't think so," Andrew said. "I've never taken orders from you, before. Besides, I've been looking for you."

"You break Sabbath law!" rolled off Peter's tongue before he could stop himself.

Andrew was used to his brother's acerbic style. They'd wrestled and fought each other as young boys, but now they just



baited each other with words. It was their way.

"I can't walk to prayers with my eyes shut, can I?" Andrew countered.

"We are very good at explanations, aren't we?" Peter said slowly.

"Almost as good as James and John," Andrew nodded. "Their story is that they ran away to fight another day. My excuse is that I thought they had a plan and so I went with them. And what is your excuse, Peter?"

"I told myself that I could rescue him," Peter said. "I couldn't. I failed him in every way."

"Three times?" Andrew asks, some curiosity mingled in the sympathy.

"Of course," Peter glowered. "He knew what would happen."

"We all failed him, Peter, you are not alone. I've heard that Judas hanged himself."

"I thought about it, Andrew."

Andrew looked around the garden. "Hard to do on these little olive trees. Still, you must face your life. Be strong and courageous, as Gideon was," he said, pausing for effect. "Here, I brought you something to eat, brother."

"I'm not hungry."

"No one is hungry today, but we may need the strength to run. Someone remembered to put grain and hay in the manger before Sabbath sundown."

"Feeding the animals hardly seems important today!" Peter spit out.

"Feeding our animals is important everyday, at least to them. We need to take that colt and his mother back to the owner. John and James are waiting for us."

Andrew pushed a folded piece of unleavened bread into Peter's hand. It was cold but filled with soft, creamy goat's cheese, crushed olives, and herbs. Peter realized that he was hungry. He bit into it and the flavors filled his mouth.

In Bethany, a white lamb softly butted his head against Simon's leg. Simon scratched him between the ears as the animal sniffed out a long forgotten almond, hidden behind Simon on the bench.

"Is this little fellow going to be next Sabbath's dinner?" Simon asked Mary Magdalene.

“Not if Ruth Esther has anything to say about it. She comes over and pets him all the time. She’s given him a name and checks his water twice a day. She’ll make a good mother, that one. Too bad she’s not married, yet. I was married by age fourteen, God bless my late husband.” Simon looked startled. Mary Magdalene continued. “But then, I’ve heard that the old shepherd who sold us this lamb finds her quite engaging.”

Simon frowned.

Mary watched, satisfied, and then said, “Her father, the rabbi, is a good man, too. He’s searching for something. He talks to the ones Jesus healed. He talks to the ones Jesus delivered. He talks to all of us.”

Simon exploded with an exasperated sound, saying, “Why did He die? Jesus could have saved himself! He had so much power. He could do anything, so why was he so passive? I don’t understand!”

Mary nodded, and then said, “He had a plan. I don’t understand it, but he had a plan. I trust him to do the right thing. I’ve trusted him since the day he delivered me from the horrors inside my mind.”

Simon looked miserable but sadly nods.

“Simon, I hear Mary; she’s awake. It will take a few minutes for us to get ready. Just wait here,” she said. “You know how crazy Martha gets when we’re late for one of her meals.”

The lamb bumped his leg again, and then perked his ears, looking toward Ruth Esther’s door that had just opened.

On that quiet day in between the Crucifixion and Easter morning, Jesus’ family, followers, and eleven apostles found each other again. Food was shared and plans were made for the next day.

Food is important. It symbolizes life and hope.

The Israelites knew that from the first Passover meal’s instructions, baking unleavened bread, striking the door posts with blood, roasting and eating the meat with bitter herbs, and leaving nothing behind.

Mary knew from Jesus’ first miracle, turning the water into wine, at the wedding at Cana.

Peter was going to find out over hot, fresh fish by the Sea of Tiberias.

“Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep,” the risen Christ would instruct.

A few months later, after the Day of Pentecost and the conversion of many people, including Ruth Esther and her parents, there was a wedding supper in Bethany. The Marys helped and Martha did the cooking (fussing the whole time with her younger sister.)

Food is important.

And that little lamb, tied by the back door, was never eaten but lived to a venerable old age in Simon and Ruth Esther’s back yard. Somewhere in between that Passover afternoon and glorious Resurrection morning, his sacrifice was no longer needed.

The End



Narrow Road/Youth Take-home SPRING 2016

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Samson: Failure or Success?

written by Kent d Curry

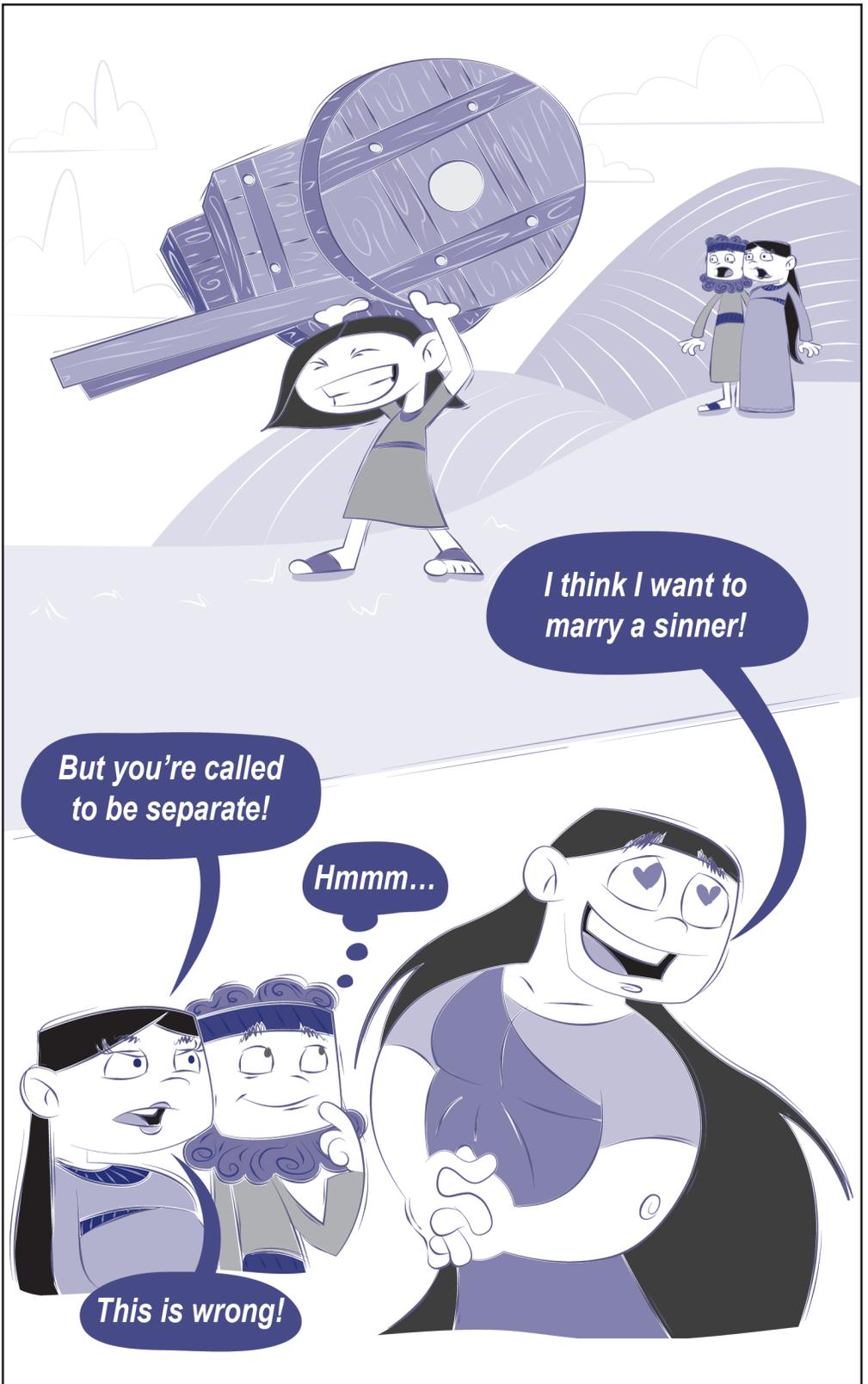
art by Kat Moyou

Yes, your son will be the
next judge of Israel!



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YOUTH
April 3, 2016



I think I want to marry a sinner!

But you're called to be separate!

Hmmm...

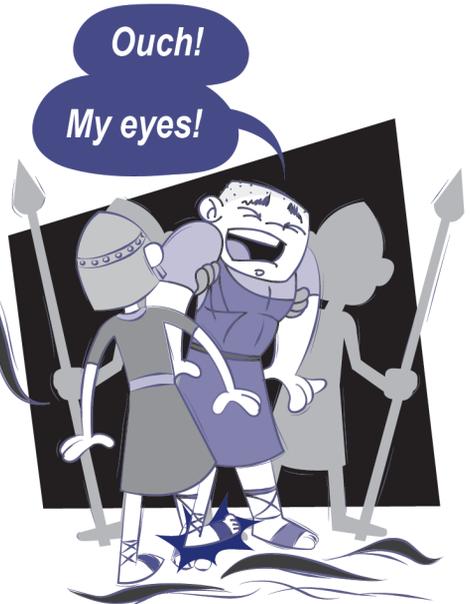
This is wrong!



You did what with my wife!



If you cut off my hair, I'll be helpless.



Ouch!
My eyes!



The Prodigal Son's Older Brother

written by Kent d Curry

art by Kat Moyou



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YOUTH

April 10, 2016



Six months later

...so, Dad, that's all I've been able to do in record time.

That's great, son!

Son, why don't you take a few minutes off.

Can't.

There's still so much to accomplish.

Maybe we could talk? I miss...

I'd love to Dad, but maybe after everything's done.





Son, I appreciate all of your efforts in my name.

Why are you so busy working for me without getting to know me?

Huh?

Get to know your father first. I'll take care of the work.

Gulp! That never occurred to me.



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Legion: First Missionary to the Gentiles

written by Kent d Curry

art by Kat Moyou



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YOUTH

April 17, 2016



No, you stay here.
You're a Gentile...

...in this region of Gentiles.

Tell everyone on this side of
the Sea how God delivered you,
and maybe they'll welcome
me back.

Please leave five
minutes ago!

You killed
our pigs!

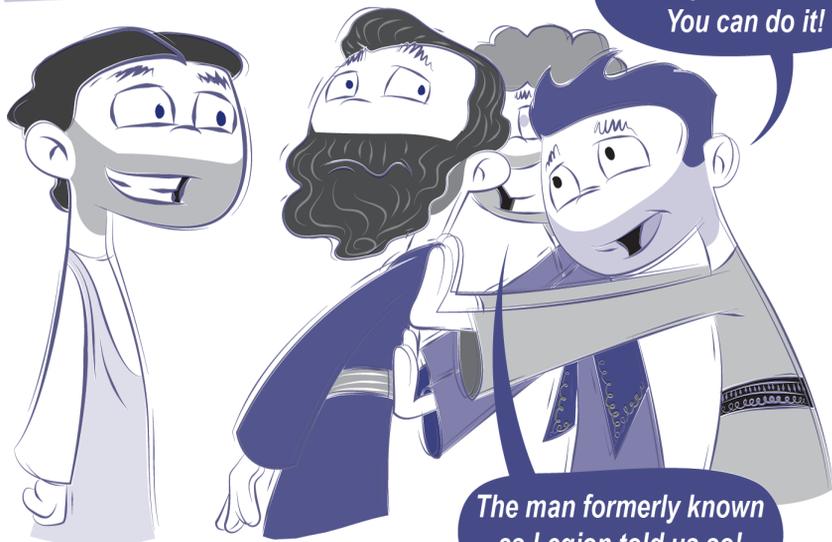


Never come
back, you hear!

**The man did better than Jesus asked.
He testified to all of Decapolis
(10 cities) constantly!**



Much later, when Jesus returned to Decapolis...



*Jesus, please heal him!
You can do it!*

*The man formerly known
as Legion told us so!*



*Ephatha! Be opened.
You're healed!*

**So Jesus did a mighty miracle,
all because the first missionary
to the Gentiles told them about
this Jewish Messiah!**



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Simon Peter: Failure or Success?

written by Kent d Curry

art by Kat Moyou

Jesus, You're talking crazy! You're not going to die.

Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me!



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YOUTH
April 24, 2016



Can't you even pray with me one hour?

Wha—!?



I tell you I don't know anyone named Jesus!

Cock-a-dweedle-dee!

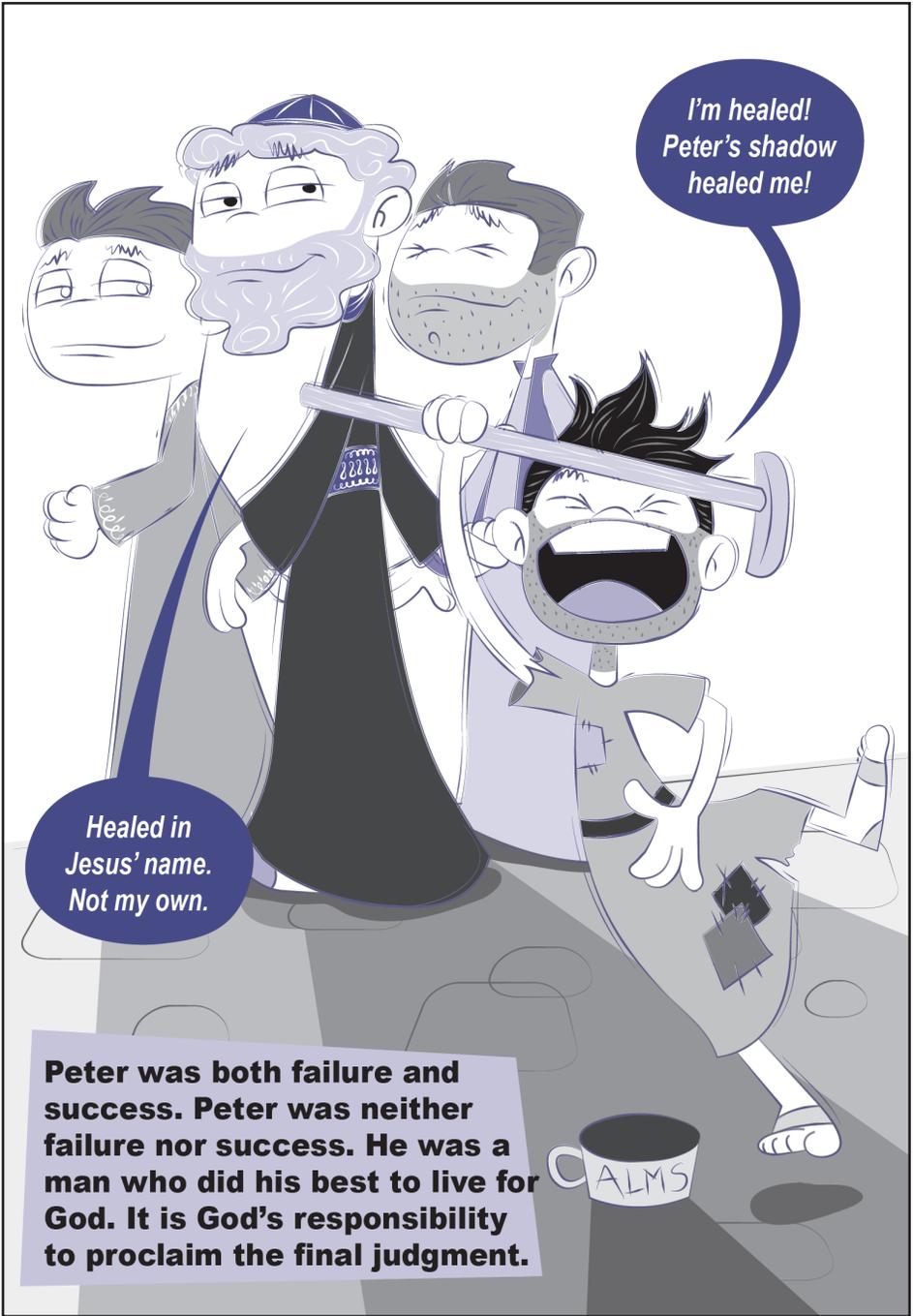


**Thou art the Christ!
The Son of God!**

**Flesh and blood
hasn't revealed this
to you Peter, but God
in Heaven.**

**...and ye shall be
filled with the
Holy Ghost!**





*I'm healed!
Peter's shadow
healed me!*

*Healed in
Jesus' name.
Not my own.*

Peter was both failure and success. Peter was neither failure nor success. He was a man who did his best to live for God. It is God's responsibility to proclaim the final judgment.



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John Mark: Failure or Success?

written by Kent d Curry art by Kat Moyou



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YOUTH

May 1, 2016

**Barnabas and John Mark
rode off to Crete.**



**Paul and Silas
went elsewhere.**



**Scripture is silent on
how successful they were,
but there's no doubt on
their mission and expertise.**



History says John Mark ended up ministering with Peter...



...which helped lead John Mark to write the first Gospel, which was later named after him—the Gospel according to Mark.

John Mark rebounded from failure so well that even Paul admitted it!

Bring young John Mark to me! He's an asset to the kingdom of God!



Was John Mark a failure and a success? Yes. He was a teenager who determined to live for God through both failure and success. That determination was more important than the results.



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My Gift Got Dropped

by Ann Frake

This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 10: “My Body, God’s Gift.”



You wouldn't think that a 6'4" tall senior in high school, who has been shaving since before his freshmen year, would be sent to a children's hospital. But that is just one more insult to add to the growing list. Apparently pediatric hospitals cater to anyone from birth to age twenty-one, especially if they're still on their parents' insurance.

I was winning a bike race when I got flipped over the handlebars onto my head. I was wearing my helmet but the fall still knocked me out. Two weeks later I had my first seizure. Now I am getting to do all sorts

of new things, like attending a high school support group for misfits at Nation-wide Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus, Ohio.

I have received shots, taken pills, answered all questionnaires, filled endless vials with blood, and I have been pleasant. But I do not want to sit around with the kiddies and chat about my feelings—and I told my parents so this morning. They promptly dropped to their knees and began to pray with earnestness for me. I went to my room.

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YOUTH
May 8, 2016

MDA[®] Muscular Dystrophy Association

They prayed for one hour. I timed them. I really, really feel coerced. Prayer is such a dirty trick.

You might think that I'm not saved, that I don't go to church, that I don't have the Holy Ghost, but I do. Or at least I did a few months ago before the first seizure. Since then, God and I aren't speaking. I'm not talking to Him and He has definitely not sent any angelic messengers to me.

My parents have noticed. The whole church has noticed. I'm a little touchy since it turns out that "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," doesn't actually include driving. My weird, old, full-of-character car is rotting in the driveway. I can't pick up kids for Sunday school. I can't drive to youth meetings. I can't . . . oh, let's not bother continuing this list.

And now, to add insult to injury, I have to be driven downtown to a "touchy-feely" support meeting. Really? Got a flame-thrower? That's how I feel.

But Dad appears in my doorway, red-eyed and serious, and asks me to please come. OK. Sure.

Mom and Dad go to a parents' support group down the hall and I head into the playroom. Seriously, it's the playroom. It has toys and fun stuff, and a circle of chairs, with some kids already seated. I sit next to a boy with a shiny, bald head. A girl clanks in on arm crutches, clatters into the chair on the other side of me, and whacks me with one of the crutches.

"Hey!" I say.

"Oh, sorry," she giggles.

"She does that to all the new guys," the bald kid whispers in my ear.

There are ten of us seated when a

man in his thirties, wearing a horrible yellow sweater, begins.

"I'm Abel Gallup, and I know some of you," he says. "We're a support group, which means we might get to be friends. Introduce yourself to the group and tell them why you're here."

"I'm here because mama made me

epilepsy society

come," a skinny girl pipes, braids flipping as she tosses her head. We all laugh.

"I know," says Abel, "but since this is a medical support group, I need you to give your diagnosis."

The girl grins, "I have a terminally smart mouth."

"Yes, you do, Poppy," Abel grins back, "and . . ."

"I have MS."

"That is . . ." Abel prompts. He's got a mission, but I don't know what it is.

Poppy sarcastically draws it out, "I have mul-ti-ple scler-o-sis."

"Who's next?"

The boy next to him says, "I'm Matt, I have CF, Cystic Fibrosis, lungs," and taps his chest.

"Brittany, car accident, blind as a bat,"

“Sarah, brain tumors, but just with headaches. I can still read.”

Everyone seemed to be talking shorthand. I’m not catching it all.

“I’m Ashley, Becker MD—not Duchene.”

“Ashley, not everyone knows what MD is, or what the other names mean,” Abel prompts.

“MD is muscular dystrophy and Duchene starts when you’re little. Becker hits in your teens.”

Poppy is in the next chair, so it skips over to the bald kid next to me.

“I’m Chris. I have cancer in my intes-

I just smile at Poppy and say, “Seizure disorder.”

She offers Satan’s evil little grin back and says, “Epilepsy.”

At 6’ 4” tall, I stand up.

Poppy stands up. She is 5-foot nothing. She pokes her bony little finger into the middle of my chest and says, “You are afraid to say it, you big chicken.”

“Now, Poppy,” Abel begins.

After looking her in the eye, I say, “Ep-i-lep-sey!”

She has her head tilted way back to look at me and smiles, “I like you. You’re not afraid of me.”

She hops back to her seat and I sit back down. What a weird group.

The girl on the other side of me waves one of her crutches in the air and announces, “If you two are done, I’m Jessica and I have cerebral palsy.” With that she uses her crutch to whack my foot. I glare at her to keep from wincing.

Chris leans over and says, “You are going to be black and blue, because she thinks you’re cute.”

Red-haired Jacob announces “Juvie’ Diabetes,” and the dark, thin boy next to him says. “I’m Tyler. I have heart problems, and I’m on the list for a transplant. But this heart thinks Poppy is the cutest girl ever.”

Groan. Kids! Poppy and the girls on her side of the circle giggle and Poppy blows Tyler a kiss. Seriously, there is no dignity. What did I do to deserve this? Abel rolls his eyes heavenward and tells them to behave.

eppsy ety

tines and I’m doing chemo and radiation.”

“I’m Michael and I had a bike accident,” I admit. “I’ve had some seizures.”

“Epilepsy,” Poppy corrects. “You’ve got to say the name or Abel will have the seizure.”

She’s sensitive, that one. I haven’t actually said the “E” word yet to anyone. Not even to myself.



We have one assignment. We must write down the names of everyone in our group and their diagnosis. We are going to have to know them next week. What kind of a support group is this?

We take fifteen minutes and get it done. Abel releases us, but I have twenty minutes to kill before Mom and Dad are done in their session, so I hang around. Abel starts stacking chairs and I help him.

"You've really got a kiddies' group going," I tell him. "Maybe there's another group for someone my age."

"You're seventeen, right?"

"Yeah."

"There are three seventeen-year-olds in this group. There are two eighteen-year-olds, four sixteen-year-olds and one who's fifteen," he says without looking at me. "You may find their appearances misleading. Sometimes a long-term physical condition can make teens seem younger."

"Some of those kids are dying, right?" I ask.

Abel pats me on the shoulder and says, "Actually, we're all dying, just at different speeds. And then, there's the surprise factor. Some who should die soon, don't, and some who seem very healthy die unexpectedly."

"I'm not dying," I tell Abel.

He just grins at me and says, "Not ever?"

"Well, some day, when I'm very old."

"Good for you," Abel says, nodding, then walks out of the room.

I feel like I've missed something. I still have ten minutes to wait. I hang around in the hall until "blind as a bat" Brittany comes tap-tapping past with her white cane.

"It's Brittany, right?" I say, as she gets near.

"Oh, you still here, new boy?"

"Michael," I remind her.

"I remember," she says in a curt tone.

"I'm blind, not stupid."

"How old are you?" I blurt out.

She stops and crosses her arms. "I'm eighteen, how old are you?"

"I'm seventeen."

"Driver's license?" she asked.

"Yes, but I can't drive, now."

"Me, either," she sighs. "Ain't it great?"

"No."

"No, it's really not," she agrees, her voice hollow. "But you can still see, right? You can see colors and your hair in the morning and whether or not you spilled pizza down your shirt. You're miserable but you can pick up a book and read it, watch puppies playing, or your mom bake cookies. If you were looking for sympathy, you have chosen the wrong person today, Michael."

"Sorry."

"Me, too. I shouldn't take advantage of the beginners," she says, begins walking away, and then turns. "Are you going to come back?"

"Yes," I surprise myself. "I want to take notes from Tyler. He's got style."

"He is something else," Brittany says.

"See you next week. Figuratively, of course."

She moves on and I think about my ability to read a book. I can still read my Bible. Maybe I'm ready to start some dialogue with God again. I mean, if I can talk to Poppy and Brittany, surely I can talk to God.

(to be continued)



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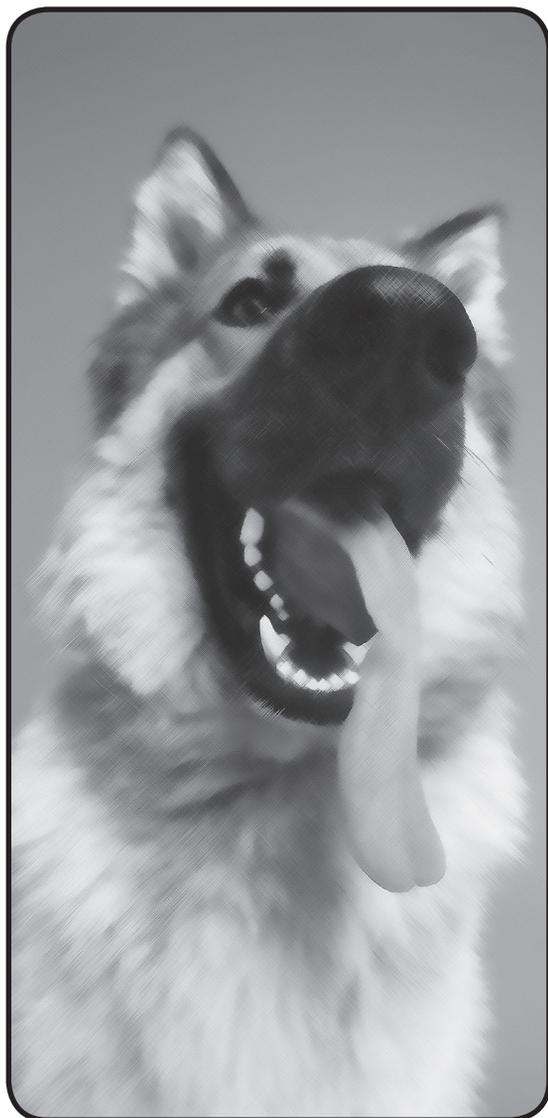
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4 Paws for Ability

by Ann Frake

This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 11: "Life Is a Many Splendored Thing."



I was winning a mountain bike race, way ahead of the pack. Except I hit a rock and flipped over the handlebars onto my head. The fall knocked me out, in spite of the helmet. Two weeks later I had my first seizure. Now I'm getting to do all sorts of new things, like attending a high school support group at Nationwide Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus, Ohio, and shopping for a service dog. As a newly-minted epileptic, this is supposed to distract me from my car, since the doctor has revoked my driver's license.

I've been looking at the photos of German shepherds and other pointy-nosed, big dogs. Apparently some dogs can smell a difference in body chemistry right before a seizure hits. Then they alert their person, who sits down and gets ready for the earthquake to arrive. I call my seizures earthquakes because everything starts to rock visually before I go down. I lose consciousness and when I wake up, I'm soaked to the skin and feel like I've been on a mountain leg of the Tour de France. Every muscle is tired and I need to sleep for a while. I understand there are other types of seizures, but I haven't done a lot of research.

Anyway, a big, cool dog sounds like great therapy. At least I'll have something to talk about in the weekly support session. You know, since I've stopped talking

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YOUTH
May 15, 2016

4 Paws for Ability

to my church friends and school friends, it's nice to know that I have someplace to talk, if I ever think of anything to say.

Dad has the day off, and Mom even packs up the family poodle, Millie, for the trip. Millie wears a pink bow and a pink diamond collar, and has a pink carrier that looks a lot like a purse. She's not really big enough to be a dog. I think she might be an oversized mouse.

This dog place, 4 Paws for Ability, is in Xenia, Ohio, just outside of Dayton, and I can hear the dogs barking as soon as I get out of the car.

The tour takes about an hour and some of the dogs are beautiful. They cost \$22,000 each. Mom and Dad take it in stride, but we didn't pay that much for our family car. Also, it turns out that there is no guarantee your dog will notice your seizures before they happen. Some dogs can, and some dogs can't, and it might take years to develop the skill.

One of the trainers tells Mom that Millie can join the puppy session. Millie promptly rounds up the puppies in the middle of the room like a little sheep dog. Then she sits and looks at Mom for approval.

"Good girl! Did you find all the puppies? Good girl!" Mom coos. It's embarrassing.

A golden retriever pup wanders over to me and sits at my feet, looking up.

"Hey, buddy!" I say, smiling. Millie comes over and sits down next to him, also looking up at me. "Hey, mouse," I say.

A big collie joins them, and they look funny, sitting in a row, gazing up at me.

Then the room tips sideways, like it's sinking.

I wake up with Dad kneeling next to me,

quietly praying in the empty room. He's brought in fresh clothes for me from the car and I use the restroom to change. I sleep in the car on the way to Columbus. We have our support groups this evening at Nationwide Children's Hospital. We're supposed to eat at Schmidt's Sausage Haus in German Village afterwards, which has always been a family treat, but I'm worried that I'll ruin everyone's meal with a seizure.

Fear. I hate this fear of the unknown.

There are only nine of us today. I sit next to the same bald kid, Chris with chemo, and have to laugh when he tells me that Abel Gallup, our group leader, is always late and always wears ugly sweaters.

"You missed the one with whales all over it. It was hard to look him in the eye."

Abel doesn't disappoint today, rushing in with a hairy brown cardigan that seems to have a life of its own.

"I hope you looked over your list from last week," Abel begins. "Please move to the seat you had last week for a few minutes."

There isn't much shuffling since most of us had sat down in the same seat.

We start with our homework, identifying each other by name and diagnosis.

Matt begins with himself, and rattles off



the list like a machine gun, “Matt—cystic fibrosis, lungs; Brittany—traumatic blindness; Sarah—brain tumors; Ashley—muscular dystrophy; Poppy—multiple sclerosis; Chris—intestinal cancer; Michael—epilepsy; Jessica—cerebral palsy; Jacob—juvenile diabetes; Tyler, who’s not here—heart transplant.”

We all look at Abel, but he reassures us, “No, he’s just getting some more tests right now. We’re still waiting for a heart.”

Poppy the mouth says, “You know, some kid’s gotta die for him to get a new heart.”

I sure am glad I get to come to these sessions. They cheer me up so much. Although that would make a good youth meeting devotion, “Someone Had to Die So That I Could Get a New Heart.” I used to do those until I got real busy being an epileptic.

When we get past the names and diagnosis, Abel announces, “Michael went to 4 Paws for Ability today and had a seizure. Michael, tell us what happened.”

“Those dogs are expensive!” Poppy interrupts.

I’m grateful. It gives me something to talk about.

“Yeah, they are. I don’t think I can afford one,” I tell them.

“How much?” Brittany wants to know.

“The cost to raise and train each dog is \$22,000.”

Abel knows about it, “Yes, but each client only has to raise about \$13,000 of that, and they help you set up fund-raising activities.”

“Really?” Brittany asks.

“Yes, but they don’t have Seeing Eye dogs,” I tell her. “They have assistance dogs.”

“Brittany, you might not need a dog. You might get your sight back,” Poppy announces.

We all turn and look at her, and even Brittany turns her head in that direction.

“Well,” Poppy says, “that’s what I read.”

“No,” Brittany says.

“Did the doctors say that you were permanently blind?” Abel asks gently.

Brittany doesn’t answer.

Poppy, who cannot keep that mouth shut, answers for her, “She doesn’t want to get her sight back. She feels guilty because her sister got killed in the accident.”

Brittany doesn’t answer.

Wow. Brittany carries a lot of guilt. She really needs the Holy Ghost.

“Is that true?” Abel asks.

Brittany starts to cry, Poppy opens her mouth and Abel holds up his hand to stop her. “We’ll come back to Brittany in a minute,” he says. “Michael, I want you to tell us what happened right before your seizure today.”

And the ball is back in my court.

“I was watching the dogs, who were sitting on my feet, and the room started tipping. I don’t remember anything else.”

“Sitting on your feet?” Poppy asks, flipping her braids with a clack.

Jacob frowns and says, “Why were they sitting on your feet?”

“I don’t know. They just started coming over, sitting down and staring at me. They looked funny.”

ONWIDE
LDREN’S

*hospital, everything matters.*SM

4 Paws for Ability

Sarah and Ashley start whispering and bald Chris smiles at me.

“What?”

“You are the biggest dummy I’ve ever met,” Poppy announces.

Jessica clatters her arm crutches over and whacks my foot, “They knew.”

“Who knew what?”

Abel hedges, “It does sound like they knew you were about to have a seizure.”

“But one was a puppy and one was the family pet. They’re not trained.”

“I thought you said no one could train dogs to sense seizures,” Matt reminded me.

“They either had the ability or they didn’t.”

Brittany has stopped crying long enough to comment, “You already own a dog that can sense your seizures coming on. That’s amazing.”

No, that’s appalling. “I’m not taking a poodle wearing a pink bow around with me!” I insist.

“And he’s ever so grateful,” Poppy says to Brittany.

Brittany, who should be mad at Poppy for her earlier comments, says, “Poppy, explain to him that he can TAKE-OFF-THE-BOW. It’s not a permanent fixture.”

Abel smiles, “You seem to have recovered, Brittany. Tell us about your sister.”

Mom and Dad are waiting in the hallway. As we exit, each kid stops and has to pet Millie, who is also waiting, glad to be out of her carrier. She takes it all as her due. She doesn’t seem interested in me, and I’m grateful.

You know, if she really can really sense when my seizures are coming on, it would be a big help. Suddenly, I do feel like going to Schmidt’s Sausage Haus for dinner, with cream puffs as big as softballs for dessert.

(to be continued)



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Dropped Like a Hot Potato

by Ann Frake

This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 12: "Forgiving Others Reaps Great Rewards."



I'm 6' 4", skinny as a beanpole, and awfully handsome (my mom says), but I will not be dating anyone in the future. Actually, I wasn't really dating anyone in the past, but there was always hope. Now, I have about as much chance of getting a girlfriend as our pet poodle has of becoming a Great Dane.

I was winning a mountain bike race and got flipped over the handlebars onto my head. I was wearing my helmet but the fall concussed me. Two weeks later I had my first seizure.

Now I rarely go to school, I always sleep through church, and shower only occasionally. I refuse to wear anything but comfortable jeans and T-shirts and I attend a high school support group for misfits at Nationwide Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus, Ohio.

But I like them. They're all weird and have something wrong with them, like me.

Of course, they never talk about God and I don't either. They don't even know that I go to church or that I have the Holy Ghost, if I still have the Holy Ghost.

I don't feel like praying and when I try, it seems pretty lame. *Hi, God,*

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YOUTH
May 22, 2016

Dropped Like a Hot Potato

thanks for epilepsy.

Before my accident, when I was active in church, I had a crush on Emily Brooke Elliott, the prettiest girl ever, ever, ever. She's nice, too. And that's the new problem. Her niceness has bypassed the "I'm interested stage" and has become the "you're pitiful" variety.

Also, my school absences have reached all limits allowable. If I want to graduate with my class next year, I can't miss anymore school and I have to salvage some of my classes. My papers are crammed in my locker, two feet deep.

I wait till the halls are empty and drag a big trashcan over to my locker. I sit on the floor and start making piles around me. I find three papers that should have been turned in a week ago.

I hear running in the halls and see three of my classmates coming. They have to get their training mile in, even though it's pouring rain outside.

"Hey!" I yell, without too much thought. "Where's the fire?"

They run past and don't comment. Last semester they would've come up with some smart remark back, like "Beautiful girls are chasing us."

Now, I'm invisible.

I keep sorting the wretched papers. Near the bottom I find stuff from last semester. I find a youth group schedule and notes from a devotion that I gave on a youth night last fall. It's called "Forgiveness, the Gift That Keeps on Giving!" How lame. Who did I have to forgive? The dog?

My notes are good, though. I've got Bible verses and I compare forgiveness to growing a pumpkin. The seeds are dry, the soil is poor, and the sun is too hot. What good will it do? But slowly, slowly, the pumpkin grows. And with patience, what pumpkins! I have a note that pumpkins are



a main crop in Africa.

Those guys running past, they're not mean; they just don't know what to say to me. I could forgive them. I will forgive them.

I hear their footsteps, again.

Shall I stand up, hold out my arms and yell, "I forgiiiiive yoou!" as they run past? Too scary.

Instead, I stand up and smile, hold up my arm for a high five and make eye contact.

Slap. Slap. Slap.

"Good to see you, Mike," the last guy yells over his shoulder.

Yeah, that works. Better than being invisible. I hate being ignored. Of course, I've done a pretty good job ignoring God for the last three months. I don't like to think about it.

"Hi, Michael. What are you doing?"

Emily Brook Elliot asks, looking at my piles of papers.

"I'm cleaning out my locker."

"You want any help?"

"Nope."

"OK," she shrugs and walks away.

I do not want help. I want to ask you out for a cup of coffee, but I don't have a car and caffeine might trigger my seizures.

"See ya," is what I actually say.

She turns 180 degrees on her little heel, walks back, and says, "I really don't see you, anymore, Michael. You haven't come to any of the church youth meetings or functions since Christmas. When you do come to church, you sit with your parents and wait for them out in the car at the end of service."

I mumble something incoherent.

"Come on, Michael, we used to be friends. Now you avoid all your friends. Did you get epilepsy or leprosy?"

"They're similar," I tell her. "You have no idea."

"Well, actually, I do," she says. *Who re-*

placed nice, nice Emily with in-your-face Emily? "I've been reading about seizures and epilepsy since January."

I close my eyes and start to shudder and shake.

"Mike? Are you OK?"

I open my eyes and stop shaking.

"Yes, I'm fine, but what if that had been a seizure brought on by stress? Then what? My seizures don't stop with shaking. They get worse, and then I fall on the floor and do a pretty good imitation of being electrocuted," I say. "Good times."

She's pretty, she's little, but she's strong, and she punches me in the arm, hard.

"Ouch!"

"Don't you ever pretend like that again, Michael! I am not afraid of seizures, but I am afraid that you're losing out with God and that I'm losing my friend."

"I don't need your sympathy," I say.

Emily's perfect eyebrows rise. "I thought we liked each other before you needed any sympathy."

Really?

"You like me?" I ask.

"Not anymore," she says.

I grab her hand, then say, "But you might, if I quit being an idiot?"

She gently takes her hand back, "I don't hang with guys that don't love the Lord as much as I do."

A sticky situation, since I'm not talking to God right now. I haven't forgiven Him for letting me get epilepsy.

"Why don't you come to the prayer meeting tonight and the youth meeting on Friday night?" Emily invites, and I am not confused. It is not a date and she's not inviting me to go with her.

"I can't go to the prayer meeting," I tell her. "I've got my support group meeting tonight."

"Why don't you invite your support

group to the youth meeting and start being nice to your real support group, the one that prays for you?”

“Oh.” Masterfully handled.

“See you, Michael,” she says, and this time she really walks away.

My evening support group starts late, as always. Abel Gallup, our fearless leader, wearing an orange sweater with yellow goldfish on his fishbowl of a tummy, arrives late with a startling announcement, pointing to an empty seat.

“We’ve lost one member of our group,” he says. “Brittany’s traumatic blindness seems to be recovering and she’s doing well.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. We’ve all got serious medical conditions, but Tyler, who is waiting for a heart transplant is missing. He’s running late. We’re all happy to see him wheeled in by the orderly.

“I had to get a shower so that I would smell wonderful,” he announces to us, “and so that beautiful Poppy would notice me.”

Poppy, the mouth, giggles with the girls and yells, “I notice you, Tyler.”

We all make disgusted noises.

“They should pay me more money,” Abel jokes. “Now, let’s hear about Jessica’s detention.”

Jessica has cerebral palsy and uses arm crutches.

“Someone tripped on my crutches,” Jessica says.

“You whacked some cute boy with those crutches,” Poppy corrects.

“I accidentally hurt someone’s big old

foot with my crutches,” Jessica says.

Matt, with cystic fibrosis, changes the focus when he talks about trying to keep up in school hallways with his breathing problems. Chris is done with chemo and feeling better, while Jacob’s diabetes is worse because he loves sweets and sneaks them.

I pull a purple piece of paper from my pocket, unfold it, and put it in the middle of the floor. It’s an invitation.

“There’s a youth group meeting at my church this Friday night. I haven’t been in a long time, but I used to really enjoy them. Would anyone like to come with me?”

“You scared?” Poppy asks. Everyone stares. I blink.

“A little bit,” I tell her.

“I’ll go,” she says, “but your mom will have to call my mom.”

“OK, anyone else?”

Jessica says she’ll come and Chris, too, who has started wearing a stocking cap on his bald head.

We all exchange telephone numbers, and set up times and pick-up points.

“Next week is our last meeting,” Abel announces. “Then we’ll be referring you to support groups that are in your local neighborhoods. Is there anything special you’d like to do next week?”

“Can I bring a friend?” I ask.

“Group?” Abel asks.

“Only if you bring treats,” Poppy grins. “I like homemade cranberry, cashew, and coconut cookies.”

We look at her in unison.

“Well, I do,” she says as she flips her braids.

(to be continued)



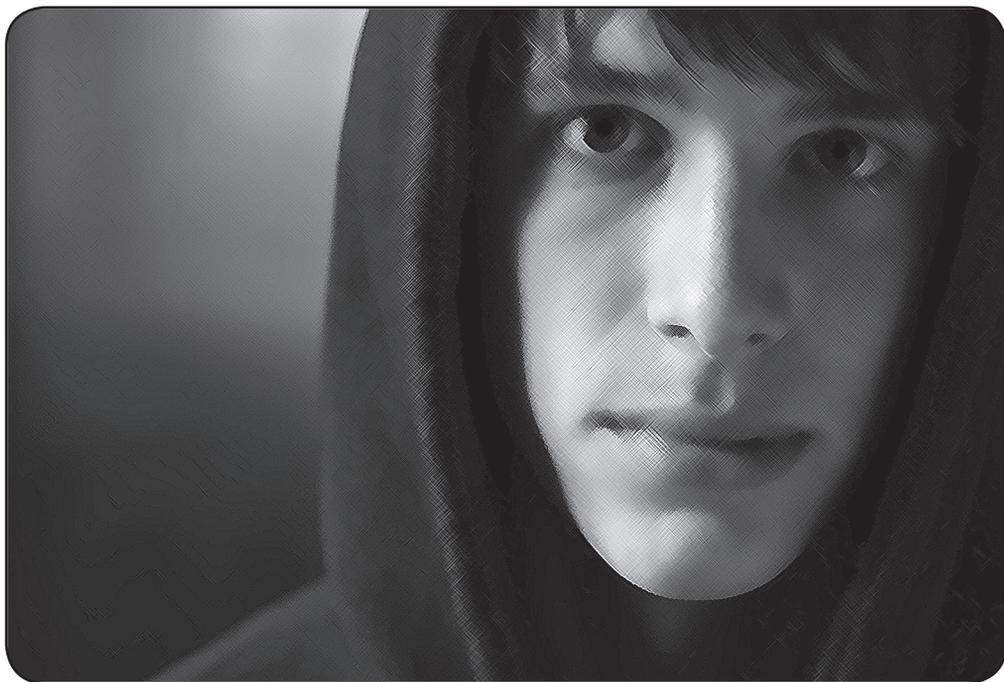
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Something New

by Ann Frake

This story emphasizes the theme in lesson 13: "Forgiving Myself: Harder Than It Sounds."



If you put me, my parents, and three friends in a car with a weird little poodle wearing a pink bow, you will get one happy dog. Millie is bouncing from lap to lap and my friends are laughing at her. She's ignoring me.

We're all on our way to the church youth group meeting tonight. That's pretty normal, right? Until you add the fact that my parents are driving me, a 6' 4" seventeen-year-old who should have his driver's

license. But they took that away after I hit my head and got epilepsy. My friends also have serious medical conditions. Jessica has cerebral palsy and needs arm crutches, Chris is recovering from chemo and radiation for his cancer, and Poppy has a big mouth. Well, she also has multiple sclerosis, but the big mouth is the real problem in her case.

My mom has a pile of medical releases and parental contacts in her lap, in case anyone has a problem at the meeting. She and

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YOUTH
May 29, 2016

Dad are going to clean the sanctuary while we meet in the basement.

We're running just a few minutes late because we have trouble finding Chris' address. I tell my guests about the typical schedule before we get there. First we have a devotion, then we eat, then we do at least one practical exercise that illustrates the point of the devotion, and finally we play Ping Pong and table games.

The parking lot is about half full. At least I didn't get the night wrong. We get on the slow moving lift to the basement and Poppy flips her 800 beaded braids and says, "I bet you didn't tell anyone we

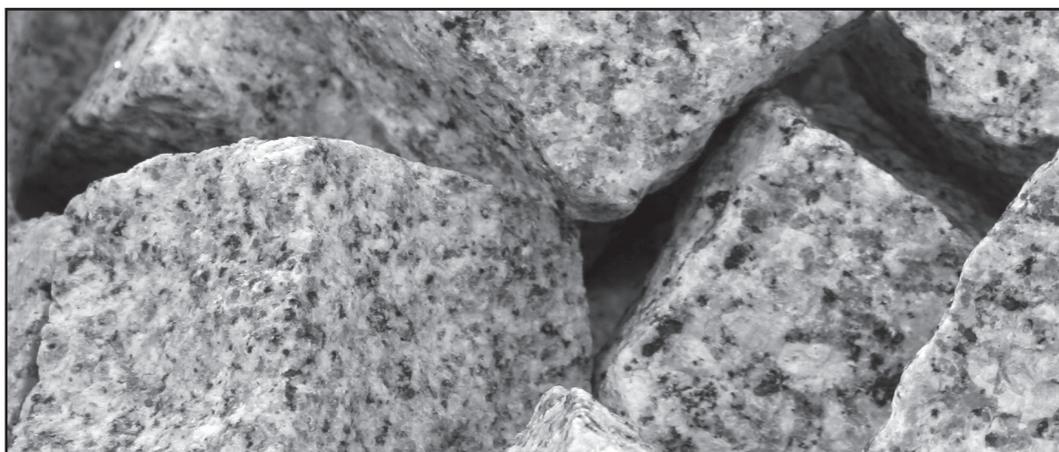
a circle in front of us and it's obvious that they've already started. Our youth leader stops mid-sentence.

"Hi," I say.

My friends jump up from their chairs and rush over. The youth leader stops talking and greets each one of my guests as I introduce them. Everyone makes room for us, and we feel welcomed. I had forgotten how great they are to visitors, and now I am one.

Tonight's lesson is about how much God loves us and wants to forgive us. And because He loves and forgives us, we can forgive others.

I hate this lesson. I feel guilty. I hate



were coming, Michael."

I hate it when she's right, and she's always right. I'm feeling a little embarrassed. I haven't been to a youth group meeting in months. I haven't really talked to anyone at church since the accident. I haven't been very friendly to anyone. I essentially put a "Do Not Disturb!" sign on my forehead, and now I'm going to show up late and unexpected, with a bunch of "new friends." What was I thinking?

The lift doors open like a stage curtain and there we all stand.

Everyone's sitting in folding chairs in

feeling guilty. I try not to listen.

The food is great. There are Frito Pies, served right in the bags like I like them, and my mom sent caramel brownies. Someone else made Rice Krispies Treats, God bless them. It's a good thing Jacob didn't come, with his diabetes. But I could bring a sugar-free dessert for him, if he wanted to come. I'll tell him at support group next week.

Poppy, with the tracking abilities of a scent hound, has found Emily and asks if she's the mystery guest I've invited to group next week.

Emily laughs but says, no, it's not her.

She makes direct, sustained, interested eye-contact with me over Poppy's shoulder. I try not to drop my Frito Pie. I can't actually smile at her because my mouth is full. By the time I swallow the moment is gone.

Now we're going to do a practical exercise to illustrate the devotion. Our youth leader asks for volunteers. Poppy, the brave, is the first to raise her hand. I feel like I should volunteer if she volunteers, so I raise my hand. Emily volunteers, too.

The youth leader brings in a wheelbarrow full of rocks. He tells us a little story of a boy named Malcom, who collects rocks

breaking out in a sweat trying to hold it.

"The weight of carrying anger and hurt is too much," our youth leader explains.

Please explain faster, so I can put this box down.

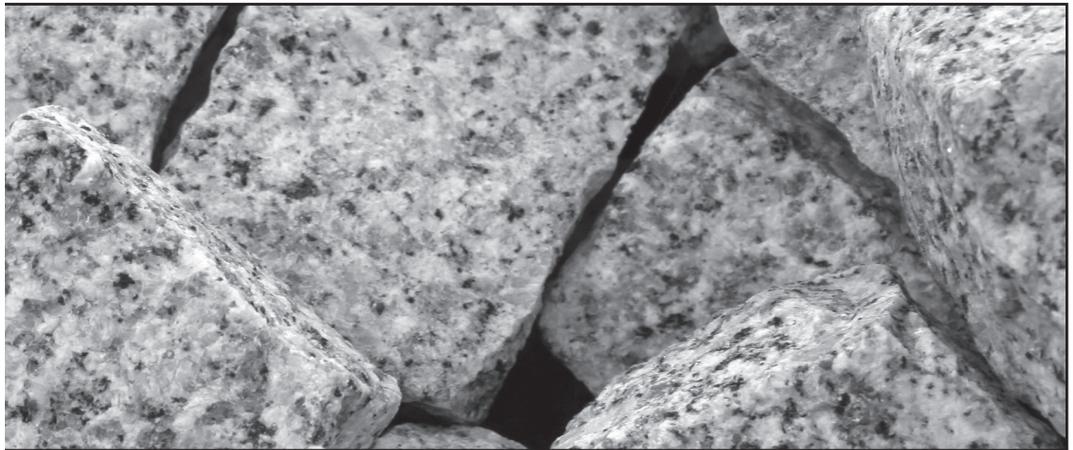
"God has made an easy way of escape. Poppy, leave that heavy coat of grudge and step away."

Poppy hops up and takes a bow. Everyone applauds. They like her.

"Emily, unload that backpack of anger," our youth leader directs.

Emily leaves the backpack behind.

"Michael, ask everyone to come and help you unload those stones. As they



every time something or someone makes him mad. He puts a coat with big pockets on Poppy, who is little and frail and obviously can't handle much weight with her multiple sclerosis. He fills her pockets with rocks and then sits her on a chair.

Then a backpack goes on Emily, and gets filled with heavy rocks until she has to sit down, too.

But for me, there is a special treat. I get to hold a big box in my arms with the direction not to put it down. There is some unholy glee in the group's eyes as they fill my box with heavy rocks and stones. I'm

take each one out, say 'I forgive you.'"

"Hurry, hurry!" I yell. "Let me forgive you fast!"

It goes quickly and soon I can put down my empty box.

"Thanks, everyone," the youth leader smiles. "Remember, it's God's plan to forgive you and for you to forgive others. It keeps you light, and full of His light. Let's pray."

I bow my head. I haven't prayed in a while. It's hard to start a conversation when you're mad at someone. I fake it. It's a quick prayer, and then we play games.

It's a good evening. I have a great time and so do my guests. Jessica doesn't hit anyone with her crutches and two boys talk to her willingly. Chris keeps his knitted hat on and wins one round of Ping Pong. Poppy is pumping Emily for information, I think, and looks very happy. I'm sure I'll hear all sorts of embarrassing stories next week in group.

I thank my church friends as we're leaving for welcoming me back and making the evening great.

We drop everyone off, with the promise of cranberry, cashew, coconut cookies, along with some chocolate chips for group next week.

The evening is done and I'm exhausted. I'm ready for bed and I reach over to turn off my light and knock my Bible off the bedside table. I pick it up and flip it open. There is a note, in my handwriting. It says, "I will be thankful!" I probably doodled it during a sermon a year ago. I used to be OK. I don't like the new me very much.

I don't kneel. I don't close my eyes. But I do say aloud, "Do You still love me, Lord? Did You want me to be an epileptic?"

"No."

I hear a voice, but it's not God answering me, it's my dad at the door.

"Michael, you had an accident. If you'd been born with epilepsy, it still wouldn't be a personal curse from God. Human bodies are weak, flawed, and fall apart, especially as we grow older. It is the nature of humanity. We are not angels, not super beings, not perfect, and prone to breakage."

"Yeah, I noticed."

"A lot of the time we blame someone to

avoid blaming ourselves."

I'm embarrassed to find myself crying. Dad's pretty cool. He sits down next to me on the bed and puts his arm around my shoulders.

"Dad, I should've been more careful," I gush.

"Maybe, but we'll never let you get hurt again. Mother is making you a bubble wrap suit, right now. Promise you'll always wear it and never, ever leave this room?"

That makes me laugh.

"Michael, things could be a lot worse. Your brain got shaken up, but we didn't lose you or your unique personality. We can work through the other stuff."

After he's gone, I try praying, again. "I'm sorry, God. I blamed You for the epilepsy, and I blame myself for the accident. Forgive me and help me work through this new stuff. And thank You that I didn't have a seizure tonight at the youth group meeting. I really appreciate it! And could You help me get my act together at school and church? I want to do it fast, but I might have to do it one rock at a time to lighten my load. Thank You for Mom and Dad, my youth group, my support group, and even Poppy."

She is certainly going to be surprised when I bring my guest, Millie, the family pet, to our support meeting. I forgave her for being a poodle and bought her a camouflage scarf and leash set.

The End



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