

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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Thank you for choosing the What We Believe series and the fourth volume, *What on Earth Can I Do?* As with every Apologia textbook, you will find this Bible curriculum easy to use for your whole family. The text is written directly to the student, making it appealing for children of all ages. The material is presented in a conversational, engaging style that will make the study of God's Word exciting and memorable, thereby creating an environment where learning is a joy.

Each lesson contains a great deal of information and is formatted to allow children to learn at their own pace. The course is designed so that you may customize the amount of time you spend on each lesson, depending on your child's interest level and attention span. We do, however, recommend that you present the lessons in order, as each lesson builds on ideas previously discussed. Although most of the lessons can be covered in two-week segments, some will go a little more quickly, while others may take longer. Older students can read and do the activities on their own. Younger students will enjoy an older sibling or parent reading along with them.

Please note that the Bible verses in each lesson are taken primarily from the New International Version (NIV), although a number of translations are employed. For the sake of clarity, the authors have also made extensive use of the New Living Translation (NLT) and the New Century Version (NCV) as these versions use vocabulary more accessible to younger students. We recommend, however, that your child use your family's preferred translation for the purpose of memorizing selected passages.

### NOTEBOOKING

Notebooking is a fun tool that enables students to personalize and capture what they have learned in an artful keepsake. In each lesson in this book, you will find a number of passages under the heading "Make a Note of It." In these sections, students are asked to write about what they've learned or about an experience they've had that relates to the lesson. As children think about their lives in light of the lesson, the spiritual truths of the text will come alive for them and make real-life application easy.

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For this purpose, Apologia publishes companion notebooking journals for this series. These full-color, spiral-bound journals include all “Make a Note of It” assignments as well as puzzles, activities, mini books, reading lists, lesson plans, and additional pages for taking notes. Students are encouraged to personalize these journals by filling them with their own words and illustrations.

For younger students—and those who learn best while their hands are busy—we have compiled a 64-page companion coloring book for each of the volumes. Lovingly illustrated, each page depicts a story or teaching from the textbook to reinforce the lessons.

### LESSON STRUCTURE

Each lesson in *What on Earth Can I Do?* contains several key components.

**The Big Idea.** Each lesson opens with an introduction to the main topic of the lesson and a brief overview of what students have learned up to this point.

**What You Will Do.** This section states the learning objectives for the lesson.

**Short Story.** Each of the lessons contains a short story featuring characters about the same age as your children. These stories provide a glimpse into the lives of characters with differing worldviews and integrate concepts taught in the lesson that follows. As the story’s characters work through their differences, minister to one another, and seek counsel from the Bible and their parents, students see what a worldview looks like in action.

**Think About It.** These thought-provoking questions dig deeper into the short stories and can be used to measure students’ comprehension. You may choose to supplement or adapt these questions to better suit your children’s age and reading level. More than reciting information back about the story itself, these questions probe students’ understanding and provide great dinner-table talking points.

**Words You Need to Know.** Important vocabulary words in each lesson are defined in the this section. Students should write these definitions in their notebooks. These are words that will be used and examined during the lesson and throughout the book. As students familiarize themselves with these words, they will be better prepared to express their faith to others.

**Hide It in Your Heart.** Although the Bible is quoted extensively throughout the book, each lesson identifies two specific Bible memory verses for students to write in their notebooks. The first of these expresses the main theme of the lesson. By memorizing this verse, your student will learn that the theme of the lesson is biblical and something God desires us to know. The second pertains to a character trait that students will be encouraged to internalize and demonstrate as a result of the lesson. These verses are ideal for Bible memorization or copy work. The verses have been chosen carefully for the clarity of the concepts they communicate, but you may prefer to use your family’s favorite translation of these verses.

**Integrated Learning.** Throughout the text we have provided interesting articles with an age-appropriate approach to interdisciplinary topics related to the main text. Some of these topics are specifically related to elements in one of the short stories, while others are tied directly

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to the lesson. These articles are designed to help students to pursue the book's ideas and concepts across the fields of art, math, science, history, and more. The beauty of the integrated learning approach is that it gives students a broader understanding of the main subject while exposing them to new interests, skills, and experiences.

**What Should I Do?** This section highlights a specific godly character trait that students should demonstrate as an appropriate response to what they have just learned. Here students are given tools to consider how the lesson applies to their own lives. Consciously practicing godly character traits will create growth.

**Prayer.** The main body of each lesson concludes with a prayer that helps children to acknowledge the gifts of God and thank Him for all He has done. You may also choose to adapt these prayers for use as a family.

**Parables of Jesus.** The final portion of each lesson is a story, adapted from a teaching story told by Jesus during His ministry on earth. Explain to the student that although these stories are faithful to the parables as told in the Gospels, we have imagined them from the unique perspective of one of the characters in the parable while providing cultural details to help students better understand what is happening in the story. We have provided culturally appropriate names to many of the characters, and in several instances we have created new peripheral characters to help us tell the story in an engaging way. Through these stories students can explore what Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven and what God expects of His people.

**Going Deeper.** These discussion questions encourage children to think about the parables of Christ and what they mean for us today. The questions also help students to consider how they might become better stewards in light of Jesus' teaching.

**House of Truth.** Four of the lessons end with the addition of a new part of the House of Truth. Intended to be a hands-on memory aid, the House of Truth is a visual model constructed one step at a time. As new concepts are learned, the foundation, walls, and roof of the house are constructed, giving children a concrete way of thinking about their lives within the kingdom of God. In *Who Is God? (And Can I Really Know Him?)*, we erected the foundation and first wall of the House of Truth, the Fellowship Wall. In *Who Am I? (And What Am I Doing Here?)*, students completed the second wall of the house, the Image-Bearing Wall. In *Who Is My Neighbor? (And Why Does He Need Me?)*, students completed the third wall of the house, the Servanthood Wall. In this volume, children will erect the fourth and final wall in the House of Truth, the Stewardship Wall.

Students can draw the House of Truth in their notebooks or build it with items you have on hand, such as LEGO blocks. A three-dimensional model of the House of Truth is available for purchase from Summit Ministries. This colorful, durable model is designed to be constructed block by block as each affirmation of the biblical Christian worldview is developed in the lessons. You do not need the model to make effective use of the What We Believe series, but the model forms a visual, tactile framework that can help children understand these truths and integrate them into their lives. The model can be purchased at [www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org).

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### LESSON PLAN

Each lesson is designed to be flexible and adaptable to your family's needs. Organize the lessons into a schedule that works for you and your child. Here is a sample lesson plan to consider based on a schedule of three weeks per lesson, two days per week:

#### WEEK ONE

**Day One:**

Read “The Big Idea” and “What You Will Do”  
Read the Short Story and discuss  
Discuss the questions in “Think About It”

**Day Two:**

Study “Words You Need to Know”  
Memorize the “Hide It in Your Heart” verses  
Read and discuss the first third of the main lesson  
Write or draw in the notebook about what was studied

#### WEEK TWO

**Day Three:**

Read and discuss the second third of the main lesson  
Notebook the “Make a Note of It” activities  
Write or draw in the notebook about what was studied

**Day Four:**

Read and discuss the final third of the main lesson  
Notebook the “Make a Note of It” activities  
Write or draw in the notebook about what was studied

#### WEEK THREE

**Day Five:**

Read and discuss “What Should I Do?” for character development  
Read and use the prayer for spiritual development  
Write or draw in the notebook about what was studied

**Day Six:**

Read the “Parables of Jesus” story  
Discuss the questions in “Going Deeper”  
Construct or draw the next phase of the House of Truth

### ADDITIONAL TEACHING MATERIALS

Some lessons contain activities that require advance planning. A list of materials for these activities has been provided with each activity. Nearly all the materials are household items or

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are easily obtained. You will find the Apologia website to be a valuable source of information and materials to help you in teaching this course.

### WHY SHOULD YOU TEACH WORLDVIEW?

When a particular worldview is held by a large number of people, it becomes highly influential, swaying many through media, entertainment, education, and corporate behavior. Some of the more widely held worldviews of the twenty-first century include secular humanism, socialism and Marxism, New Age, postmodernism, and Islam. Not to be excluded is the biblical Christian worldview, the focus of this curriculum.

People develop their worldviews based upon beliefs they perceive to be true. Obviously, not all beliefs are true. If they were, we would not see the wide diversity of behaviors that stem from different interpretations of the same reality. For example, the beliefs of secular humanists that permit abortion cannot be equally true with the beliefs of conservative Christians that do not permit abortion. Nor can the beliefs of cosmic humanists that identify all existence as part of a universal consciousness be equally true with the beliefs of Christianity that affirm that creation is dependent upon one transcendent God.

Diverse beliefs about reality fill the marketplace of ideas in the emerging global village. Many ideas are competing for dominance, and this competition is producing conflict and confusion in cultures long held together by traditional worldviews. Christian-based cultures are awakening to find mosques standing next to churches and Bible-based laws swept from the books by a simple majority vote of humanist legislators and judges.

Within this global arena of conflict and change, Christians are faced with at least two critical questions: “How do we know what is true?” and “How must we live our lives in relation to the truth we come to know?” This curriculum is designed to address questions like these. It is based on the biblical Christian worldview, which affirms that truth is absolute and knowable through the revelation of God. It affirms that knowledge of God is the beginning of wisdom and the key to understanding the world around us.

You have the privilege and responsibility of leading a child not only in the paths of truth, but also to a knowledge and fear of the One who is the Truth, Jesus Christ. With the lessons contained in this, the fourth book in the What We Believe series, you will lay several essential foundational truths upon which the biblical Christian worldview is built. Lay these stones of truth well. Pray that God will continually reveal and confirm the truths of His Word in the hearts of your student and that your child will respond in obedience to them.

We think you will find this to be an important course of study. Many eternal truths are presented that can change the way students look at the world every day. Minor points of doctrinal difference have been avoided in order to focus on the larger issues that make up our faith. As Christians we are asked to be ready to give an account of the hope that is in us. We trust this book brings your faith into clearer focus and your family ever closer to the Lord.

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### **COURSE WEBSITE**

The Apologia website contains additional resources to help you teach this course. Visit [www.apologia.com/bookextras](http://www.apologia.com/bookextras) and enter the following password: Godsworld. Be sure the password contains no spaces. When you hit “enter,” you will be taken to the course website.

### **NEED HELP?**

If you have any questions while using Apologia curriculum, feel free to contact us:

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# YOUR STORY OR GOD'S STORY?

NOW ALL GLORY TO GOD, WHO IS ABLE, THROUGH HIS MIGHTY POWER AT WORK WITHIN US, TO ACCOMPLISH INFINITELY MORE THAN WE MIGHT ASK OR THINK.

EPHESIANS 3:20, NLT



## THE BIG IDEA

Claude Rains may have been the greatest film actor you never heard of. He overcame a childhood speech impediment to develop a unique speaking voice—deep, slightly rasping, yet rich and dynamic. His face could say as much as his voice, and his presence on screen could elevate an ordinary film or nudge a good one toward greatness. During his career, he played memorable roles in a number of beloved classics.

So why do so few people today know his name? It's probably because Claude Rains was rarely the star of the movies he performed in. He was rather small of stature and did not have the conventional “good looks” of a movie star. His most distinguished acting work was done in support of such screen legends as James Stewart, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Errol Flynn. You may have seen him as Prince John in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), Senator Paine in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), or Captain Renault in *Casablanca* (1942). These are among the greatest American movies ever made, yet it's difficult to imagine any of them without Claude Rains.

Claude Rains was the very definition of a *supporting* actor. He worked hard at his craft, but he never demanded the spotlight. In preparing for a role, he didn't just memorize his own lines but also learned the entire script—he knew he couldn't fully understand the



Claude Rains (on the right) in *The Sons of Liberty* (1939).

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character he was playing without understanding how his character served the larger story. He made every scene he appeared in better but was careful never to upstage (or steal attention from) the leading actor or actress. He took to heart the words of the Russian theater director whose teachings on acting revolutionized the stage. As Konstantin Stanislavski was known to say, “There are no small parts, only small actors.”

So many of us live our entire lives oblivious to the bigger story unfolding around us. We don’t even bother to read the script. We live each day as though life is all about *our* words, *our* needs, *our* dreams, and *our* desires. And we might even accomplish a few things—a college degree, a nice career, a family, maybe a few grandchildren. But when the end inevitably comes and the curtain closes on this life, what is left? Perhaps a few kind words said over a casket and a nice party afterward on the one day they know you can’t come.

Is that really all there is? Will you be satisfied with so little? Don’t you want your life to count for something *more*? It should and it can.

The first step is to realize that you do not have the leading role in this story—no matter who you are or how talented you are, your role is just a small part in an epic adventure. You need to realize that all around you God is producing a marvelous saga, written by His hand, orchestrated by His will, and unveiled according to His perfect timing. God Himself is the central character of this story, and only He is able to command center stage of all eternity. It’s a grand and glorious tale told by the Master Storyteller and is not to be missed.

Still, it’s easy to lose sight of God’s story when you’re focused on your own problems, your own goals, and your own brief existence. So many of us waste our days worrying and complaining about circumstances beyond our control and trying to make sense of it all. But your life is *not* just a random series of disconnected events. Far from it. Your life is part of a beautifully crafted story written by a good and gracious God, who is working all things together for your good simply because He loves you and you love Him (Romans 8:28). Yet it’s only by seeing your life as part of God’s story that you will ever truly understand your purpose or find satisfaction in life.

Of course, you could try to steal the spotlight from God, strutting and fretting about the stage, insisting that this is *your* life and *you’re* the star of this show. Or you can accept a supporting role in the magnificent epic that is the story of God.

This book is titled *What on Earth Can I Do?* If you have not accepted God’s invitation to join His story, if you have not made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, then the simple





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answer to this question is “Not very much of real consequence.” For it's only in Christ that you will learn who you are, why you have been put where you are at this very time, and what you are capable of. The Bible calls Jesus the “author of life” (Acts 3:15). Long before you ever heard of Him, He wrote a part in His story especially for you (Ephesians 1:11–12).

If you have accepted His free gift of salvation, and if you will choose to embrace the role God wants you to play, then you have an awfully big adventure ahead of you. For through His awesome power that is at work within you, He can do infinitely more than anything you might think to ask or even dare to imagine (Ephesians 3:20). But you will need to spend each day talking with God, reading His Word, and allowing the Holy Spirit to control your thoughts and actions.

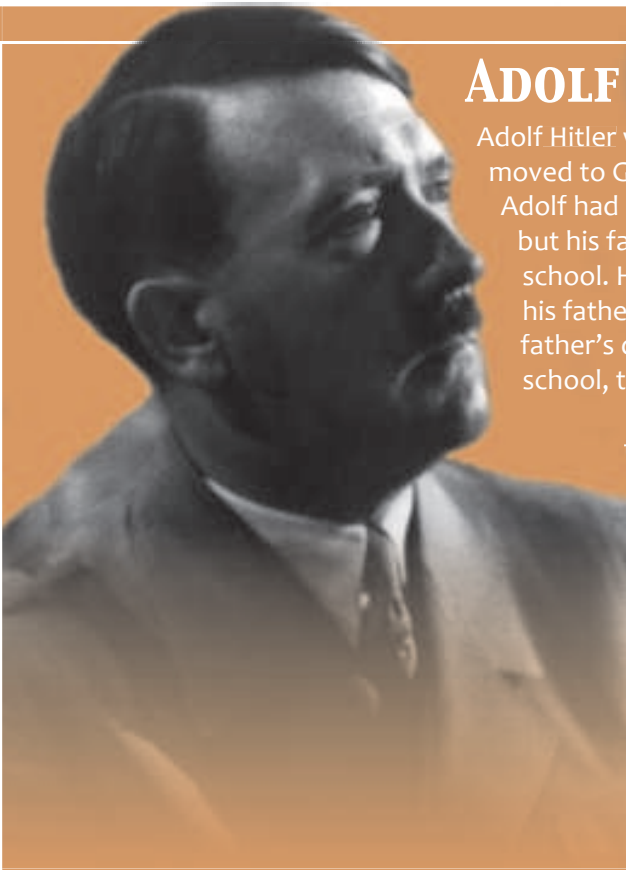
Yes, studying and performing the role God has written for you is an awesome responsibility. Sometimes you will flub your lines, and sometimes you will miss your cue or fail to hit your mark. But when it seems that life is giving you nothing but bad reviews, remember that God will never give up on you. He is a loving Author, and He knows all the things you are and all the things you are not. And if God gives you a role that seems too big for you, and you begin to experience stage fright, just remember how big *He* is—and that He can do God-sized things through *you*!

### WHAT YOU WILL DO

- » You will recognize that you are a part of God's story.
- » You will understand that with God all things are possible.
- » You will be encouraged to surrender every part of your life to Him.



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### ADOLF HITLER

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria in 1889, though his family moved to Germany when he was three years old. Young Adolf had an artistic streak and wanted to be a painter, but his father disagreed and made him attend a technical school. He performed poorly there, determined to show his father that he had made the wrong decision. After his father's death in 1903, Adolf was asked to leave first one school, then another, because of disruptive behavior.

After moving to Vienna in 1905, Adolf twice applied to the Academy of Fine Arts, but he was rejected both times because of his lack of skill and general knowledge. The years he had spent acting out against his father's wishes prevented him from being able to follow his artistic dreams. He then spent several years living on the streets, working odd jobs and selling watercolor paintings.

In 1914, when World War I broke out, Hitler joined the German army and served in France and Belgium. He was decorated for bravery, receiving the Iron Cross. After Germany's defeat, Hitler became involved with the German Workers' Party, later to become the Nazi Party. He went to work full-

time for the party, making rousing speeches and gathering support. He even designed the party's banner—a black swastika in a white circle on a red background. By the summer of 1921, Hitler had risen to a position of leadership.

Two years later, after the Nazis tried and failed to seize power, Hitler was arrested, tried for treason, and sentenced to five years in prison. While there, he wrote a book, *Mein Kampf*, in which he detailed his plans for making Germany the dominant nation in the world. The book was published shortly after Hitler received a pardon and early release.

Taking advantage of the worldwide Great Depression, during which millions were thrown out of work, Hitler gained control of the German government. By August 1933, he had set himself up as dictator, and he called himself *der Führer*, or “leader.” His plans for the country centered on war. He expanded the army and then began taking control of the smaller nations around Germany—Austria, Czechoslovakia, then Poland—sparking World War II.

In the meantime, Hitler introduced laws depriving Jews of their German citizenship. He planned to deport all Jews across Europe to Siberia, but when his invasion of the Soviet Union failed, a “final solution” was proposed. The Germans formed death squads and concentration camps that targeted Jews. In the end, the Nazis were responsible for killing about 6 million Jews, two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe. This systematic murder of the Jews is known today as the Holocaust.



## KING'S CROSS

“Balderdash! All this talk of appeasement and treaties has gotten us precisely nowhere. You can't bargain with the devil. He's a liar and a thief!” Grandpa Edwards, affectionately known to the family as Poppy, drove his point home by gesturing with his unlit pipe. Poppy hadn't smoked in years, but he was rarely seen without his favorite briar pipe in hand. “The prime minister has got to stop molly-coddling that scoundrel and give him a good thrashing! He's got it coming to him.”

His daughter-in-law Anna stifled a laugh and cried, “Poppy!” She was busy letting out the hem on her eleven-year-old son's school pants. If only that boy would stop growing so quickly, she thought, she might get around to sewing some new clothes for the baby. Anna quite agreed with her father-in-law about the German dictator, but she feigned a stern look and said, “We'll have no more talk of thrashing people.”

The Edwards family had gathered in the sitting room around the wireless, or radio, this Friday evening to listen to reports that German troops had marched into Poland and that planes were now bombing the Polish countryside. British prime minister Neville Chamberlain deeply hoped to avoid another prolonged and devastating war in Europe. And so a year earlier, in 1938, Britain and France had signed a treaty with German chan-

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cellor Adolf Hitler, stating that they would remain at peace with Germany so long as Hitler's forces did not attempt to invade other neighboring countries. Now Hitler had gone back on his promise, dismissing the treaty as a mere "scrap of paper." And so once again all of Europe stood on the brink of war.

The announcer began outlining plans to evacuate young children from the cities of London, Birmingham, and Portsmouth to the surrounding countryside. If indeed war was declared, hundreds of thousands of children would leave their homes and be taken in by other families who lived away from the industrial centers of Great Britain, the most likely targets of German bombers. Hitler had already shown a ruthless willingness to strike fast and strike hard against his enemies.

Colin Edwards turned to his mother and said, "Mum, I don't want to evacuate. Jenny and I want to stay here in London with you and Poppy and baby Andrew."

His mother gave him a comforting smile, but she couldn't hide the lines of worry around her eyes. She dropped her hands and set her needlework in her lap. "I know, dear, but I don't see as we have much choice. You've already been registered, and if the evacuation happens, your school here will be shut down. You don't want to fall behind. Besides, if your father is to fight for our country, we can't have him worrying about you and Jenny and whether you're safe from falling bombs." Her husband, Trevor, was a captain with the RAF, the Royal Air Force, and his squadron was likely to be on full alert already.

Seven-year-old Jenny rubbed her eyes and said sleepily, "I'll be all right. Colin will protect me."

Poppy chuckled. But Anna gave her daughter a reassuring look and said, "I'm counting on him to keep you safe while you're away."

"Yes, but I could help out here," Colin protested. "I could work with Poppy as an air-raid warden or run messages for the Home Guard."

"Aye, and I'd be glad to have you by my side," Poppy said. "But your mother's right. It's not safe in the city for Jenny. She's got to evacuate, and she's going to need you to watch out for her."

Anna set her needlework on the table beside her and stood. "All right," she said, "that's enough talk of war and evacuations for one evening. God willing, it will all be over soon, and your father can come home as well. Now, off to bed with you."

"Poppy, can you come up and tuck us in?" Colin asked.



Neville Chamberlain (left) and Hitler (center) signing the Munich treaty in 1938. Photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R69173 / CC-BY-SA.

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"Certainly, lad."

"Could you tell us a story?" Jenny asked, rubbing her eyes again.

Colin nodded vigorously. "A story about the Great War?"

"If your mother says it's all right."

"Please, Mum," Colin said.

Anna looked dubious. "Well, all right then. But don't go giving them nightmares," she said, wagging a finger at Poppy.



Once the children had brushed their teeth and settled into their beds with their blankets tucked up under their chins, Colin said, "Poppy, I don't want to leave the city. I want to stay and help fight the Germans."

"Do your bit for king and country, eh?"

"Yes, like Papa is doing in the RAF." Colin placed the emphasis on the second syllable, as in pa-PAW. "And like you did in the Great War."

Jenny propped herself up on one elbow and asked, "Poppy, why do the Germans always want to fight?"

Poppy sat down on the edge of her bed and took his pipe from between his teeth.

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British troops in a trench during World War I.

“Oh, I don’t think they *do*. It’s this Hitler fellow who’s got them all stirred up. You see, children, the Jerries have had a rough time of it since they lost the last war. Many of the people were out of work, and a loaf of bread cost a king’s ransom. Then along comes this little fellow with the Charlie Chaplin mustache, and he starts telling the people how it’s all someone else’s fault. He blames the country’s problems on the Jews and the communists and promises to restore Germany to greatness if the

people will follow him. The people were hungry and desperate for change, and so they allowed Hitler and his Nazi thugs to take charge. The first thing he did was to take jobs away from the Jews and give them to other Germans. And then he began to do the same to any citizen who opposed him. He created a force of secret police to enforce his policies, and the secret police rule with an iron fist, terrorizing their own people. Meanwhile, Hitler has built a war machine that threatens us all.”

Jenny asked, “But why do the Germans hate everybody?”

Poppy’s aged eyes twinkled as he said, “Let me tell you a story about the time I fought the Germans in the Great War. This was 1914, the first year of the war, and the German army had pushed into France and Belgium. But our boys were there to stop the Jerries in their tracks. We dug in and built ourselves a deep trench that ran for miles in either direction. A few hundred feet away, the Jerries had dug their own trench. In between was a barren stretch of God-forsaken mud filled with bombed-out craters and barbed wire. We called this area No Man’s Land.

“Well, the winter rains came early, and both sides were pretty miserable. Most of the time, we just sat there, watching for the other side to make a move. After a few months of eating the same rations every day and dreaming of home, naturally we began to grow a bit restless.

“Then December rolled around, and we began to receive packages from home filled with letters, warm hats, newly knitted scarves, and bits of food. A few even received small Christmas trees. Then on Christmas Eve, as night fell, strange lights began appearing from the German trenches, and I don’t mind telling you we were a little scared that something big was about to happen.

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“It took us a while to realize that the Jerries had set up their own Christmas trees along the top of their trench and were decorating them with candles. At first we suspected it was a trick of some sort, and then we heard the sound of singing coming from the other side. I recognized the tune as ‘Silent Night,’ but the words were German.”

At this, Poppy's eyes grew misty, and he started singing softly:

*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,  
Alles schläft, einsam wacht.*

Poppy stopped and cleared his throat as if suddenly remembering where he was. “Well, the song ended and another began,” he said. “‘O Tannenbaum,’ I believe it was. And then . . . silence. Most of us weren't sure what to think at this point.

“Then one of our own lads started singing ‘The First Noel.’ Slowly but surely, we all joined in. And it went on like this all night, first one side singing a Christmas carol, and then the other.”

Poppy paused at the memory, until Colin insisted, “What happened then?”

“In the first light of Christmas morning, a few of us climbed out of the trench and began to make our way across No Man's Land. Through the mist, we could see some of the Jerries climbing out of their holes, too. We met in the middle, nervous at first. But then one of the Germans stuck out a hand and grinned at me, and I reached out and shook that hand like it was the happiest day of my life. Shouts of ‘Happy Christmas’ were raised, and soon dozens of men from both sides had gathered in the middle of the battlefield.



The Christmas Truce of 1914.

“We exchanged small gifts of food and traded souvenirs such as hats and buttons from our uniforms. We talked of our homes and shared pictures of our girlfriends and families. Some of us even prayed together. Then someone brought out an old football, and a match broke out. Before darkness fell again, we held a memorial service for our fallen comrades before returning to our holes.

“You see, it turned out these German blokes were a lot like us—just ordinary men who were sick and tired of sleeping in the rain and muck and wanted nothing more than to make it back to their families for Christmas and enjoy a home-cooked meal. Many of them worshiped the same God we did, which made them our brothers in Christ. I could no more hate them for being German than I could hate my own sister.

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“What we didn’t know then was that this same scene was happening up and down the front lines. Sadly, our countries were much slower to make peace. Orders were given, and the peace ended just a few days later. The war dragged on for nearly four more years.

“After the war ended, I kept in touch with the man who had given me his hand in friendship. We wrote to each other often of our experiences in the war and of our lives at home. That’s how I know so much of what has happened in his beloved Germany.”

Colin grew somber and said, “Poppy, I’m not sure I want to fight the Germans now.”

“Aye, lad. War is a terrible thing and is never to be wished for.”

“The boys at school today said that if there isn’t a war tomorrow, there won’t be a war at all.”

“That’s what they’re saying in the papers, too. We can only hope and pray that they’re right.”



Saturday came and went with no word, and British hopes rose briefly. But these hopes were soon dashed.

On Sunday afternoon, Prime Minister Chamberlain again addressed the nation, and once again the Edwards family gathered around the wireless to hear the news.

“This morning,” began the prime minister, “the British ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by eleven a.m. that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.”



Anna gasped, and Poppy shook his head in resignation.

The prime minister continued. "You can imagine what a bitter blow it is to me that all my long struggle to win peace has failed. Yet I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different I could have done that would have been more successful. Up to the very last it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful and honorable settlement between Germany and Poland, but Hitler would not have it."

Anna reached over and switched off the radio. "I can't listen to any more," she said, struggling to hold back tears.

Jenny, who was playing on the floor with baby Andrew, looked up and asked, "Poppy, are we at war?"

Poppy said gravely, "So it would seem."

That night, Anna helped the children pack their suitcases. The government had provided parents with a list of items to pack for their children. These included toiletries; clothes,



including socks, outdoor shoes, and a raincoat; a brush and a comb; six stamped postcards for writing home; card games; and a book. Colin and Jenny had been assigned to stay with Hugh and Georgiana Pemberton, an elderly couple who lived on a farm near Cambridge. By Christmas, they would be settled into a new school.

The following morning, Anna bundled up baby Andrew, and she and the children piled into Poppy's prized automobile.

"Say good-bye to Clara, children," Poppy said. "After this trip, I'm putting her into storage to ride out the war."

"Why, Poppy?" Jenny asked, adjusting her favorite red cap to cover her ears. "She's such a beautiful car."

"To save petrol for the war effort. I'll get around just fine on foot."

## Lesson 1

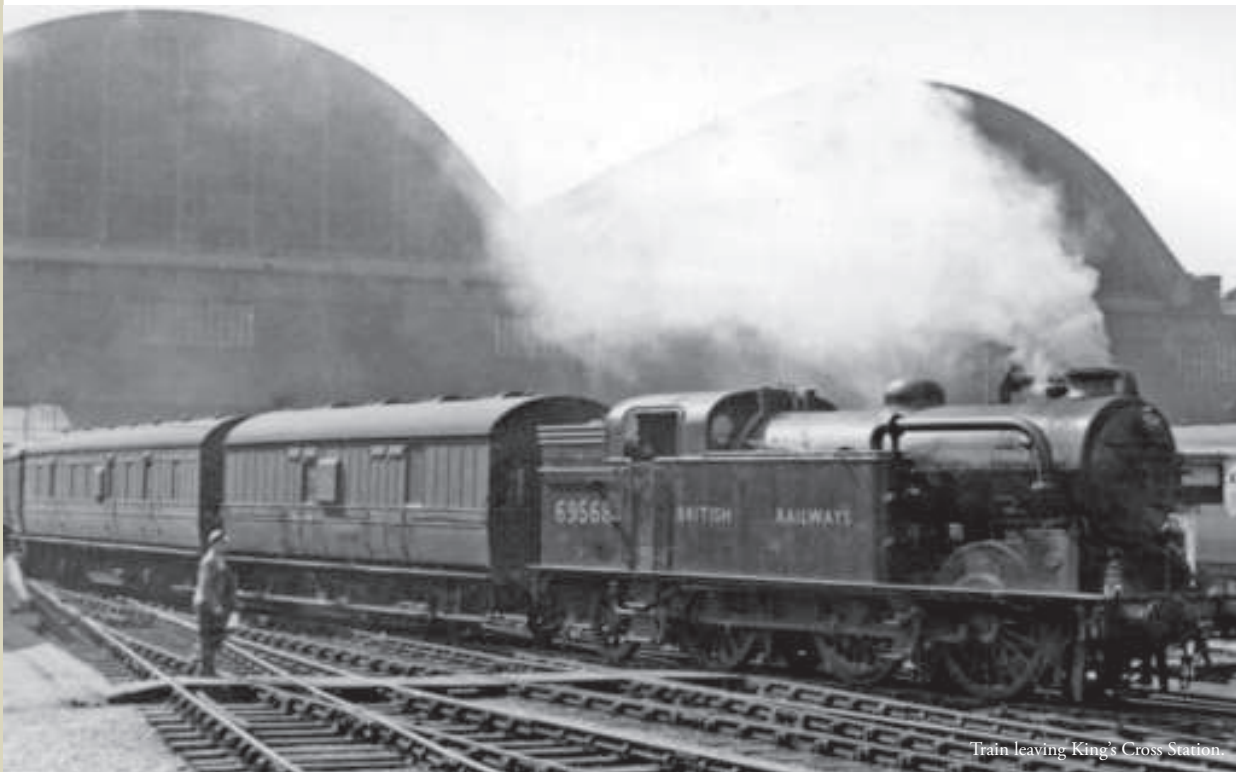
Heaven knows I could use the exercise,” he replied, patting his stomach, which wasn’t nearly as large as he pretended it to be.

The Edwards children were scheduled to depart by train from the King’s Cross railway station on the north end of London. As they neared the station, they were suddenly struck by the enormity of the evacuation. Seemingly tens of thousands of children and their families crowded the area around the station, pushing to make their way to the trains. Every child wore a large tag, as though he or she were a piece of luggage. Written on the tag was the child’s name and the address of his or her destination. Nevertheless, amid the chaos, Colin wondered if Jenny and he might easily wind up on the wrong side of the country.

Poppy parked the car some distance away and then unloaded the children’s suitcases from the boot (the trunk). A bobby, or police officer, directed the family to the proper official to check the children in and obtain their tags.

Jenny was excited at the crowds, but Colin’s spirit sank deeper with every passing moment.

“Buck up, my boy,” Poppy said. “We can’t all serve on the front lines. King and country are counting on you to be a good soldier and do your part by studying hard and watching over your sister.”



Train leaving King's Cross Station.

## Your Story or God's Story?

"I'm scared, Poppy. The farm is going to be so different from London. None of our friends will be there. We won't know anyone."

"Aye, Moses was a stranger in a strange land, too," Poppy replied. "But God had a plan and a purpose for him."

"But I'm nothing like Moses."

"When it comes right down to it, Moses felt a lot like you do. He was scared, just like you. And he was slow of speech, much like our King George. But Moses obeyed and trusted God to keep His promises, and he went out and changed the world. Do you trust God, lad?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's good. He's promised to be with you wherever you go. If you will take Him at His word and obey His commands, then you can be sure to make a difference wherever He sends you."

"But how can I *know* I will make a difference?"

"Because God makes everything work out according to His plan. Just remember, Colin, in God's story, everything turns out fine in the end. If it's not fine, then it's not the end of the story."

"I think I understand, Poppy. And don't worry—I'll take care of Jenny."

"I know you will, lad."

Once they had been checked in and had tags secured to their coats, the children said tearful good-byes to their mother and grandfather. They promised to write often and tell them all about life on the farm. Then Colin and Jenny were swept up in the mass of children boarding the trains.

"Hold tight to my hand, Jenny," Colin said.

"Don't let go of me, Colin!" Jenny cried out, hoping he could hear her over the noise of the station.

At first, they were able to stay together. But as they moved closer to the train, the press of the crowd became too great. There were so many people! Jenny's hat was jostled from her head. When she reached to retrieve it, Colin lost his grip on her hand, and brother and sister became separated. Colin thought he saw Jenny go down, as though she had fallen. *She's sure to be trampled*, he thought.

"Jenny!" he screamed.

Colin began pushing his way back through the crowd, keeping his eyes on where he had seen Jenny fall.

*There!*

He spotted Jenny sitting near a lamppost, clutching her red hat and crying, though he couldn't hear her over the tumult. When he reached her, he threw himself

## Lesson 1

over her to protect her from the crush of the crowd. Even through his heavy tweed coat, he was being pummeled by knees and boots, as the children pushed past, not seeming to see them at all.

Then someone stepped squarely on his left leg, just above the ankle, and Colin imagined he could hear the bone snap even above the din of the crowd.

The pain was unlike anything he had ever felt before! Yet he stifled a cry, so as not to frighten poor Jenny any further. He gingerly tucked his leg up under him and remained there, unmoving, until the train departed and the crowd thinned somewhat. Then he released Jenny, turned and sat with his back to the lamppost, and passed out from the pain.

A bobby spotted Colin sitting there with his foot lying at an awkward angle. He blew his whistle to call for help and then tended to the boy. Poppy and Anna materialized, seemingly out of nowhere, saying they had seen Colin pushing back through the crowd and knew something had gone wrong. Poppy lifted Colin in his arms and told the policeman he would take the boy to the hospital. Anna clutched Jenny's hand, and the four of them began to make their way back to Poppy's car.

As Poppy carried him, Colin regained consciousness. He looked up at his grandfather and said, "Did I make a difference?"

"Aye. You did indeed," Poppy said as tears welled up in his eyes. "There's a brave lad."



Children at a train station evacuating London as soldiers arrive during World War II.

## CHARLIE CHAPLIN

When motion pictures were born in 1895, the technology for synchronizing sound with pictures was still thirty years in the future. Before 1928, nearly all movies were silent. One of the most famous movie stars during the silent film era was Charlie Chaplin. He usually played a character called the Little Tramp, a bumbling but generally good-hearted vagrant who wore a tight coat, baggy pants, a tiny bowler hat, and large shoes. The Tramp also carried a cane, sported a small “toothbrush” mustache, and walked with a funny gait, presumably because of his ill-fitting clothes.

Born in London in 1889, Charlie Chaplin got an early start in theater because his mother was an actress. After touring America as a comedian on the vaudeville stage, Chaplin was asked to sign on with a film studio that specialized in making humorous short films because they liked his style of physical comedy. Chaplin began his film career in 1913, developing the character of the Tramp especially for his movies. A few months later, he began directing his own movies, something he would do for the rest of his career.

Audiences around the world loved the Little Tramp, and Chaplin's name was said to be well known in the language of almost every country. Popular songs were written about him, and many people attended costume parties dressed in the character's signature baggy pants and tiny black moustache. One hundred years later, Chaplin's Tramp remains perhaps the most imitated character of all time.

Throughout his career, Chaplin produced many well-loved and critically acclaimed films, including *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931), and *Modern Times* (1936). Yet Chaplin resisted making the transition to “talkies,” continuing to direct and star in silent films well into the 1930s.

When World War II broke out, Chaplin decided to make his first true sound film, using his signature mustache to make fun of Adolf Hitler in *The Great Dictator*. In the film, Chaplin plays Adenoid Hynkel, the dictator of the fictional nation of Tomainia. Chaplin also plays a persecuted Jewish barber who—because he looks like Hynkel—eventually switches places with the dictator and makes an impassioned speech denouncing greed, hate, and intolerance and pleading instead for human liberty and brotherhood. The movie was very popular in both the United States and Great Britain, and may have helped convince America to enter the war against Germany.

*Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives,  
is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see.*

**Corrie ten Boom**  
1892–1983

## Lesson 1

### THINK ABOUT IT

- » This story takes place in Great Britain in 1939. What is happening in Germany at this time? Why is the Edwards family worried about events happening a thousand miles away in Poland?
- » How does the children's grandfather feel about Adolf Hitler and Britain's treaty with Germany? Why? How does Poppy compare Hitler to the devil?
- » Poppy fought in the Great War from 1914 to 1918. By what other name do we now call the Great War? Why?
- » The story of the Christmas Truce actually happened on the battlefields of Belgium and France in 1914. Why do you think Poppy tells the children this story? What did Poppy learn from his experience that day?
- » Why are the children of London being evacuated? Where are they all going? How long do you think they'll stay there?
- » How does Poppy respond when Colin says that he's afraid of moving to a strange place? How does Colin make a difference in this story?

### WORDS YOU NEED TO KNOW

- » **Tapestry:** A decorative work of woven art often used to tell a story
- » **Surrender:** To give God complete control over every part of my life
- » **Parable:** A story or word picture Jesus used to teach a truth about God's kingdom

### HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

*With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. (Ephesians 3:20, NCV)*

*But I am trusting you, O LORD, saying, "You are my God!" My future is in your hands. (Psalm 31:14–15, NLT)*

## "THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE"

Maria Augusta Kutschera was born aboard a train en route to Vienna, Austria, just before midnight on January 26, 1905—a humble beginning for a girl who would become a baroness, an international celebrity, and a best-selling author. When Maria was two years old, her mother died and Maria was left to be raised by an elderly aunt and uncle. With no other children in the household, hers was a lonely and very strict upbringing. Maria's uncle was an atheist who taught her not to believe in the "inventions and old legends" of the Bible.

One day, when she was in college, Maria visited a crowded church, expecting to hear a

## Your Story or God's Story?

concert of music by Johann Sebastian Bach. Instead, a well-known priest, Father Kronseder, began to preach, and Maria found herself caught up in his teaching. When the priest finished his sermon and came down the pulpit stairs, an overwhelmed Maria grabbed his elbow and loudly asked, "Do you really believe all this?" This meeting changed the way she saw her life.

Maria joined an abbey in Salzburg, determined to become a nun. However, she struggled with the unaccustomed rules and discipline of the abbey, and her health suffered from not getting the exercise and fresh air to which she had been accustomed. It was decided that Maria should leave the convent for a year to work as a governess for the bed-ridden daughter of a retired naval captain. Maria was heartbroken. Despite her difficulties, she loved the abbey and didn't want to go. But she agreed with the Reverend Mother that "the most important thing in life is to find out what is the will of God and then go and do it."

The girl Maria was to teach one of seven children belonging to Captain Georg Ludwig von Trapp, whose wife had died from scarlet fever four years earlier. As Maria's year with the Trapp household neared its end, the children begged their father to do something to make the young governess stay. They even suggested that he should marry her. He protested, "I don't even know if she *likes* me." So the children went to Maria to ask for themselves. Maria answered, "Yes, I do."

She never returned to the abbey.



Maria von Trapp in 1942.

As you probably know, Maria married the captain, and she became mother to a talented brood of musical children. Together, they would become known around the world as the Trapp Family Singers. In 1949, Maria von Trapp told her story in a book, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*. The book was later adapted into *The Sound of Music*, a successful Broadway musical and one of the most popular motion pictures of all time.

Despite being brought up to believe there is no God, Maria von Trapp found her place in God's story. In her book, Maria wrote, "It will be very interesting one day to follow the pattern of our life as it is spread out like a beautiful tapestry. As long as we live here we see only the reverse side of the weaving, and very often the pattern, with its threads running wildly, doesn't seem to make sense. Someday, however, we shall understand. In looking back over the years, we can discover how a red thread goes through the pattern of our life: the Will of God."

### IN THE HANDS OF THE MASTER WEAVER

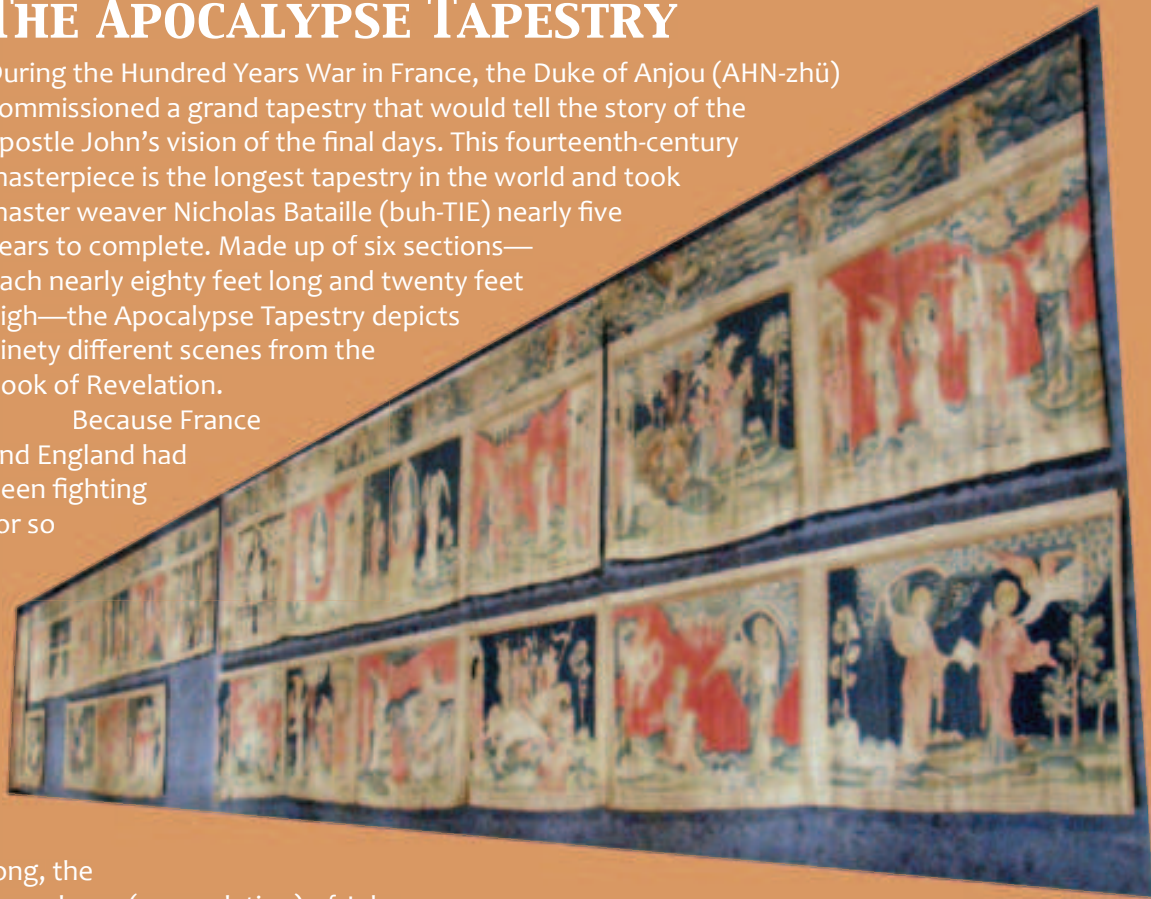
What is a tapestry? A tapestry is a decorative work of art woven from two sets of interlaced threads and constructed on a loom. The word tapestry is derived from a Greek word meaning "carpet" or "rug," though a tapestry is usually designed to be draped on a wall. This was

## Lesson 1

### THE APOCALYPSE TAPESTRY

During the Hundred Years War in France, the Duke of Anjou (AHN-zhü) commissioned a grand tapestry that would tell the story of the apostle John's vision of the final days. This fourteenth-century masterpiece is the longest tapestry in the world and took master weaver Nicholas Bataille (buh-TIE) nearly five years to complete. Made up of six sections—each nearly eighty feet long and twenty feet high—the Apocalypse Tapestry depicts ninety different scenes from the book of Revelation.

Because France and England had been fighting for so



A section of the Apocalypse Tapestry at the Château d'Angers. Photo: Rmesu.

long, the apocalypse (or revelation) of John was a popular subject. To the people of the time, the apocalypse represented the epic struggle between good and evil and the ultimate defeat of death and destruction by the forces of good. Using bright blues, reds, greens, silver, and gold, the designers created vivid scenes showing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, with Death depicted as a skeleton. Other scenes include the sounding of the seven trumpets and Michael and the angels fighting the dragon (Revelation 12:7–8). For some of these scenes, threads made from real gold and silver were used!

The tapestry was donated to the Angers Cathedral in 1480. There it remained until the French Revolution, when it was taken down and divided into smaller parts for safekeeping. Some of the pieces, though, were poorly cared for. Some were used to insulate orange trees during the winter or to pad horse stalls in local stables. While most of the pieces were recovered in the late 1800s and returned to the cathedral, almost twenty were never found.

Today the Apocalypse Tapestry is the main attraction at the Château d'Angers (sha-TOE dahn-ZHAY) in the Loire (le-WAHR) Valley in France, which houses the oldest and largest collection of tapestries in Europe.



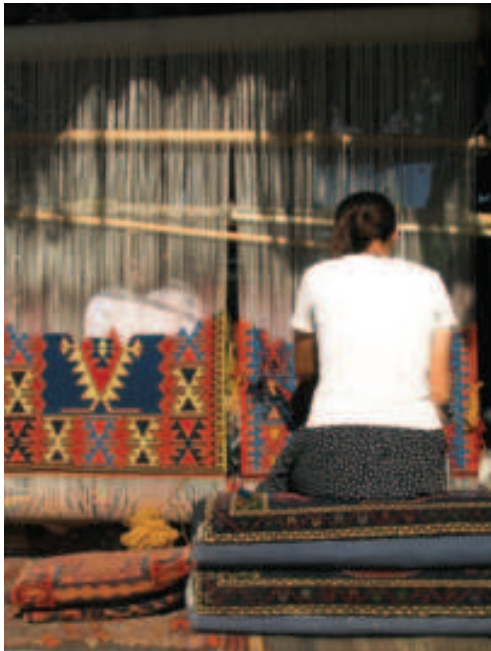
## Your Story or God's Story?

a practical consideration in medieval times, when enormous tapestries acted as insulation to protect large rooms and castle halls from damp and cold weather.

As an art form, tapestry has been practiced for many centuries, reaching its peak in craftsmanship and popularity during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the aristocracy purchased intricate and elegant tapestries as investments and status symbols. Many of these tapestries displayed family crests and other symbols of power and wealth, but most told a story in pictures. Some tapestries depicted a simple pastoral scene or a story from the Bible, while others dramatically portrayed a sequence of historical events.

One thing you should know about tapestries is that they're not very attractive when seen from behind. Looking at the reverse side, all you can see are seemingly random threads tangled here and there and tied off in knots, forming a chaos of colors. Only from the front of the tapestry is it possible to see how all the threads fit together. From the front you can see that every stitch and every knot form an integral part of a magnificent picture.

Our lives are like tapestries in this way. From where we stand, all we may be able to see are the knots, the imperfections, some bumps, the occasional smear of color. Looking at who we are and how we got to this point, the moments of our lives can seem sort of random and chaotic. Only from God's perspective can we see how all the threads of our lives are woven together to form a complete picture. And only when we look at our lives through God's eyes can we see how every action we take, every choice we make, every seemingly random occurrence forms a part of a much bigger story.



The tale is told of a missionary who was traveling in the Far East when he came across a strange sight in the marketplace: A man who sold tapestries was standing in front of his booth and shouting at a loom at the back of the booth. As he shouted in his native language, new threads appeared in the tapestry, as if by magic. The missionary turned to his guide to ask for an explanation.

“The man is a master weaver,” said the guide. “He is speaking to his young apprentice, who is back behind the loom, out of sight. The master is telling him what color thread to use and where to place it. Only the master weaver knows the entire design, so it is vital that the apprentice does exactly as the master commands.”

“Does the apprentice ever make a mistake?” the missionary asked.

“Of course. But the master weaver is a very kind man. He will rarely have the boy remove the thread. Instead, being a great artist, he simply works the mistake into the overall design.”

## Lesson 1

Like the weaver's apprentice, we cannot see the pattern of the tapestry God is weaving in our lives and in this world. We stand on the other side of the loom, looking at knotted and tangled threads placed without an apparent purpose. Occasionally, we will catch a glimpse of the overall design, but then just as soon as we think we understand the big picture of our lives, the Master calls for a thread that changes everything.

Therefore, you must trust that the Master Weaver knows what He is doing and always obey His instructions. Will you ever make mistakes? Yes, like the apprentice, we all make mistakes. Sometimes we use the wrong color thread, tie it off awkwardly, or place it crookedly. But God in His mercy will use your mistakes as part of His grand design. The things God does in the lives of His children are eternal and beautiful and important. And so you can live boldly and with confidence, knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love God" and are "called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28, NKJV).

### MAKE A NOTE OF IT

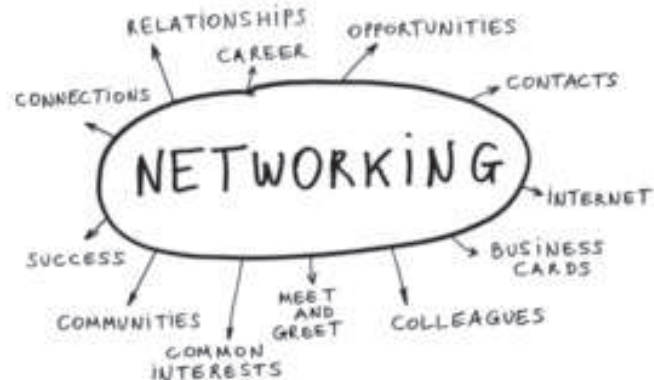
Ask a parent for some pictures from special moments in your life. These can even be from times you were too young to remember, such as the day you were born. Using these photos as a model, draw a series of "tapestries" that represent important "scenes" from your life. Try to see how each moment or scene was used by God to develop you into the person you are today.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW

The world says that to be successful in life, you've got to know the right people. Books, magazines, and business schools all proclaim the power of *networking*—that is, seeking out and building relationships with those who have money, power, celebrity, or influence. They will tell you that having friends in high places can open doors, create opportunities, and help you land the highest-paying jobs.

But you don't need an address book full of high-powered names to accomplish big things. You already have a direct line to someone who is bigger than the biggest words you can use to describe Him. How big is He?

He fills all of time and space (Psalm 139:7–9), yet He is not limited by the laws of time and space.





The hiding place in Corrie ten Boom's closet.  
Photo: Pmsocialmedia.

## CORRIE TEN BOOM

Born in 1892 in Amsterdam, Corrie ten Boom trained in the family business as a watchmaker. Her parents were Christians who dedicated their lives to serving their fellow man, and their home was always open to anyone in need. Then World War II broke out, and the German army invaded the Netherlands in 1940. When Corrie saw how the Jews were being mistreated by the Nazis, she decided to take action.

With the help of her father, brothers, and sister Betsie, Corrie began hiding Jews from the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police. The family built a hiding place behind a false wall in Corrie's bedroom, which was located in the highest part of the house. The secret room was eight feet long and two feet wide and could hold up to six people. To enter the room, a person had to open a sliding panel in the wall under a bottom bookshelf and crawl in on hands and knees. Some people stayed for a few hours, while others spent weeks waiting for the right time to escape the country.

In February 1944, the Nazis learned of the work Corrie was doing. They arrested the entire family and sent them first to prison, and later to a concentration camp. Corrie's father died ten days after being arrested, and her sister Betsie died a few months later. But Corrie survived, and on December 31, 1944, she was released because of a clerical error, just days before all the women her age in the camp were killed.

After the war ended, Corrie returned to the Netherlands to help care for Holocaust survivors. She eventually became a public speaker, traveling around the world to talk about God's love and forgiveness. She often used a tapestry to show that the dark "threads," or difficult times in life, are just as important as the light threads in making the Christian all that God intended him or her to be.

Corrie ten Boom also wrote more than two dozen books, including *The Hiding Place*, and her experiences and testimony led many to give their lives to Christ. Today, you can still visit her home and its secret room in Amsterdam.

*Do not limit the limitless God! With Him, face the future  
unafraid because you are never alone.*

**L. B. Cowman**  
1870–1960

## Lesson 1

He has no beginning and no end. To Him a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day (2 Peter 3:8).

He is all powerful. He binds together the smallest particles of matter even as He “stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22, NKJV).

He knows everyone and everything (Psalm 147:5). Nothing is hidden from Him.

He has no needs (Acts 17:24–25). He cannot be bribed with something He desires or blackmailed into doing something He doesn't want to do.

He has no equal, and no competitor is a threat to Him (Psalm 89:8). He will never be voted out of office, and His kingdom will never be toppled.

His glory cannot be eclipsed by the newest trend, the hottest product, or the latest celebrity (Isaiah 48:11). His fame will go on and on, and it will never tarnish or fade.

Maybe no one has ever heard of you. Maybe no one will ever interview you or ask for your autograph. And yet you are in a position to introduce people to the God of all creation. You are on a first-name basis with the King of kings! He will never snub you or pretend He doesn't know you. And He will always take your call, whether you're in trouble, you need advice, or you just want to talk. What greater friend could you ever hope to have?

The wondrous truth is that He is inviting you to be part of what He is doing, to join the story that never ends. Even the smallest thing you do in God's economy can reap eternal rewards. If you plant a seed in someone's life, and someone else later waters that seed, a person's life may be redeemed for all eternity. And who knows? That one person may go on to witness to *millions* about God's love and His gift of salvation!



God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. You don't have to be the swiftest athlete, the most talented musician, the most brilliant writer, or the most gifted speaker for God to move mountains through you. These kinds of achievements are admirable, and God wants us to strive for excellence in everything we do. However, the apostle Paul assures us, “With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20, NCV). And He will never grow tired or give up. The Bible tells us that God is constant and unchanging, and He will never turn back “until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart” (Jeremiah 30:24).

## Your Story or God's Story?

### MAKE A NOTE OF IT

A biography is a written account of the events that have made up a person's life. The word *biography* comes from Greek roots meaning "life" and "writing." An autobiography is a biography written by the person whose life is being described. How is the Bible like a biography? Whose story does the Bible tell? How is the Bible like an autobiography? Write or draw about some of the important events in this story. Where do you fit in this story?

### WHAT SHOULD I DO?

In 1862, during the American Civil War, Union forces under Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant had completely surrounded his enemy's stronghold at Fort Donelson in Tennessee. The fort's commanding officer, Brigadier General Buckner, knowing his men were outnumbered and growing desperate, sent a message to Grant offering to surrender if Grant would agree to certain "terms." Buckner wanted to know that his men would be treated fairly, that they would be fed and their wounds cared for. Grant refused, saying that "no terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works." Knowing that his troops' destruction was assured if they resisted further, Buckner raised the white flag and conceded defeat. The victory earned U. S. Grant the nickname "Unconditional Surrender" Grant.



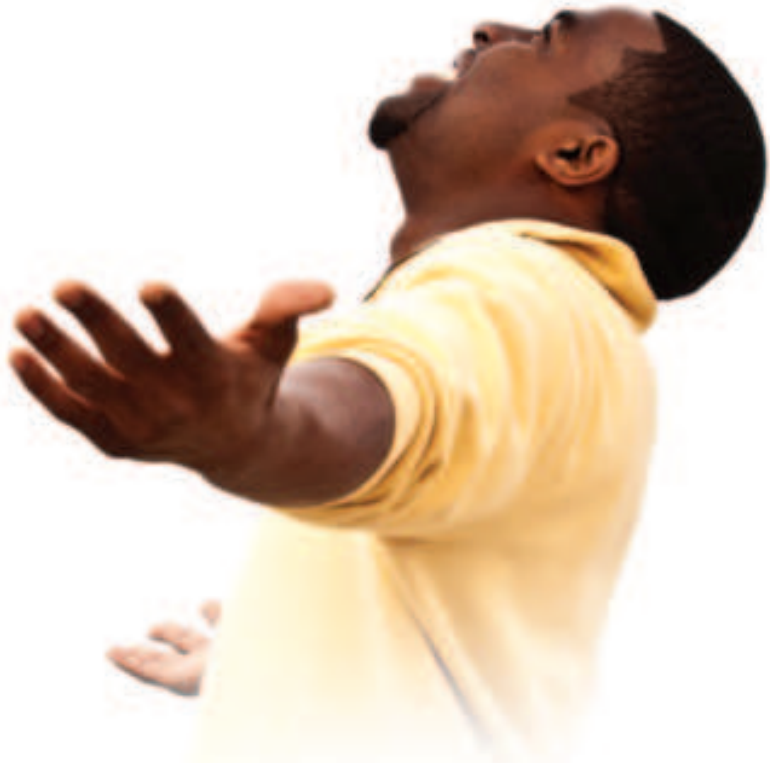
The Bible says that you were once an enemy of God (Colossians 1:21). You were separated from Him by your sin. But if you have accepted His free gift of salvation, you are no longer His enemy. Instead, He now calls you His child, and you call Him Lord. But have you surrendered to Him unconditionally? To **surrender** to God means to give Him complete control over every part of your life.

Even if you acknowledge that God is bigger, smarter, and more powerful than you doesn't mean you will automatically trust Him. Sadly, many of His followers don't. Not really. They worry and wring their hands over money because they don't really trust that God will provide for their needs. They rush into ill-advised jobs and relationships because they don't really trust that His timing is always perfect. They don't truly believe that God wants only the very best for His children. And so they hold something back—perhaps their money, a job, their health, or a sinful habit—and they refuse to surrender control over that area of their lives.

## Lesson 1

Many of us are afraid that if we surrender our hopes and dreams and plans to God, He will turn around and make us do the very thing we fear the most or go to a place so far from home that we would never see our friends or family again. But the truth is that once you know what He wants you to do, if He calls you to a place as far from home as China or Rwanda, then that is the only place where you will find your heart's joy. Indeed, you will not be able to rest, and you will never truly be fulfilled until you pack up and follow Him wherever He leads.

Our God has proven time and again that He is good. And because He is good, you can gladly give your life completely to Him. You can feel secure in His hands. Surrender every area of your life to God and say to Him, "Do with me what you will." Only then will you know the joy of the one who wrote, "But I am trusting you, O LORD, saying, 'You are my God!' My future is in your hands" (Psalm 31:14–15, NLT).



### A PRAYER

*Dear God, I know that you have given me a unique part to play in your story. You are a great God and a loving Father, and I know that your plans are perfect. Lead me where you want me to go, and I will do my best to follow. Guide my steps so that I will not wander from the path you have chosen for me. I surrender everything to you, and I will trust you with all the days of my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*



## THE PARABLES OF JESUS

# A FATHER'S LOVE

Throughout these lessons you will be exploring the answers to some very important questions: Why should I give God first place in every area of my life? What does it mean to glorify God with my money, my possessions, my time, and my talents? How can I make the world a better place? What does God expect of me? In order to answer these questions wisely, you will need to understand how God's kingdom works—and how it is very different from the way the world works.

As He traveled about the countryside teaching, Jesus used simple stories called **parables** to help people understand who God is and what His kingdom is like. In these stories Jesus used characters and situations from everyday life to paint lively

## Lesson 1

pictures that had a deeper meaning. These word pictures were taken from daily life in ancient Palestine, making reference to mustard seeds, fig trees, wineskins, oil lamps, money, treasure, stewards, workers, judges, homemakers, and wedding parties. Jesus' audience would have been very familiar with the examples used in His parables. Today, we must dig a little deeper to understand the social customs described in these stories.

However, not everyone who heard the parables of Jesus understood their meaning. When Jesus' disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, He said, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables to teach the others so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they look, they won't really see. When they hear, they won't understand'" (Luke 8:10, NLT). It's not that the stories were too difficult to comprehend but, rather, that God had hardened the people's hearts to His message because of their rebellion against Him. But God delights in revealing Himself and the secrets of His kingdom to those who humble themselves and "hear God's teaching with good, honest hearts and obey it and patiently produce good fruit" (Luke 8:15, NCV).

At the end of each lesson in this study, you will read a story based on one of Jesus' parables. Each of these stories is faithful to the parable as told in the Gospels, but the authors have reimaged the story with names, places, historical facts, and cultural details to help you better understand what is happening in the parable. Discussion questions at the end of the story will help you explore further what Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven and what God expects of His children.

The first parable we will look at is a story of God's extravagant love, the well-known tale of the Prodigal Son.

"Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!" (Matthew 11:15, NLT).

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*Why Jesus told this story: The Pharisees had been grumbling about Jesus' habit of associating with sinners and outcasts. Instead of confronting the Pharisees' accusations directly, Jesus told three parables about how God loves us so much that He pursues us to rescue us from our sins. The first parable was about a shepherd who left his flock to find a single sheep that had wandered off. The second was about a coin that had been misplaced. The third was about a young man who willfully walked away from his family and wasted his inheritance. In each story, being lost did not diminish the importance of the sheep to its shepherd, the coin to its owner, and the son to his father. All were welcomed back with joy.*



SAMUEL TUGGED AT THE EDGE OF HIS TUNIC, straightening out the last wrinkles, as he rehearsed his speech. "Father," he started, his voice cracking. Too high, he thought. He didn't want to sound like a child. His father and older brother already thought he wasn't ready to do anything on his own.

He cleared his throat and began again. "Father, may I ask you a question?" He thought about the words for a moment and shook his head. It sounded like he was going to ask for more spending money or for advice about a girl he liked. This request was much too important to get lost in such ordinary things. Samuel needed room to breathe, to get out from under the weight of family obligation. Freedom. Respect. That was what he wanted.

Samuel stood tall and took a deep breath. "Father, I have a proposition for you." That sounded better—like two businessmen negotiating a deal. Brushing the wayward strands of hair from his forehead, Samuel licked his lips, which were suddenly dry. He was going to prove to his father that he was a man now, able to handle adult decisions. Big rewards required risk, something neither his father nor his brother seemed to understand as they continually ignored his ideas. Samuel was sure that if he just had a chance to run things his way, he could show them that there were better—and faster—ways of making money. A clean break from home seemed like the only way he could succeed.

Forcing himself to smile confidently, Samuel left his room and walked nervously toward the dining hall. His plan was to make his request after the evening meal, when his father would be most relaxed. He had arranged for the servants to prepare his father's favorite dishes so that he would be in a good mood.

The smells of roasted lamb and braised vegetables wafted through the cool hallways, making Samuel's own mouth water. He felt sure tonight would be a success.



*The Prodigal Son Receives His Rightful Inheritance* by Murillo.

As they ate, Samuel watched his father slowly relax, leaving behind the cares of the day and letting the good food and company raise a smile and the occasional chuckle. At last, when the dishes had been removed, Samuel felt the time was right.

Pushing himself up on his elbow, Samuel cleared his throat to get his father's attention. "Father," he said, "I have a proposition for you." His father smiled as he turned to him. Samuel swallowed nervously. "I know that when you die, your estate will be divided between Jeremiah and me." Samuel watched his father's smile slip away, and he desperately rehearsed his reasoning one

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more time. “Jeremiah, as the older son, gets a double share, since it will be his responsibility to take care of our mother and the family business.” Now Jeremiah was paying close attention too, staring at Samuel with narrowed eyes as if trying to read his thoughts.

“What I want is to get my share of the inheritance now.” Samuel pushed ahead, ignoring the stunned silence. “I have my own ideas about business, ideas that you haven’t listened to. I want the opportunity to prove myself, and I want to do it now, rather than wait until you’re dead.”

He trailed off, suddenly ashamed to be treating his father, who had always provided his family with the best of everything, so disrespectfully. “Well, what I mean is, I think I’m old enough to

start my own business. So if I can just have my money now, instead of waiting, I’ll be able to make a good start of it.”

No one spoke. Now that the words were out, Samuel realized how harsh they sounded. What would his father say? After being treated so insolently by his son, might he disown Samuel altogether? Either way, Samuel would be free, and that was really what he wanted.

When at last Samuel risked a glance at his father’s face, the sadness he saw there nearly made him change his mind and take it all back. But this was the only way he saw to become the man he knew he could be. So he sat and waited, staring at his fingers.

At last, his father spoke. “If that is what you truly want, then I will grant your request.”

Across the table, Jeremiah bolted out of his chair, spluttering. Their father held up a hand, however, and Jeremiah sullenly returned to his seat.

“I will have my steward transfer a third of my property to you.”

Samuel pushed away the guilt gnawing at him inside. “Thank you,” he said confidently. At last his father was taking him seriously.

The next few days were busy ones for Samuel, as he prepared to put his business plan into action. His father traded only within Israel, vigilant about maintaining Jewish standards of purity. But Samuel believed that some of the neighboring Gentile countries, such as Egypt, held more potential. He was determined to explore this new avenue of trade, hoping to build a business that would rival his father’s, and he didn’t care that he would have

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to exile himself from his own people to do it.

After selling all the goods, livestock, and family property his father had given him, he left home, accompanied by the new servants he had hired and fresh goods he had selected with his broader market in mind. He was excited and confident, yet he could not completely forget the look of pain on his father's face. But what was done was done, and he had gotten everything he wanted.

After weeks of slow travel, Samuel arrived in Egypt. Full of hope, he started putting his ideas into practice, putting his trade goods up for sale and making strategic purchases and investments. Many of these ideas worked, just as he thought they would, and soon he had nearly doubled his original capital. His success also attracted new friends, young sons of wealth like himself, who encouraged him



*The Departure of the Prodigal Son* by Murillo.

to celebrate his triumph by living extravagantly and having a good time. Flattered by their attention, Samuel justified the expense by telling himself that he needed to maintain and develop his business contacts.

Soon Samuel was spending more time enjoying himself than taking care of his business, indulging in all the pleasures he had been denied at home. He also took his friends' advice on a few investment schemes, the kind of high-risk enterprises his father never would have considered. A few of these paid off, increasing his money even more. But some of the schemes were more risky and less profitable. A few even lost him large sums of money. Samuel waved off this misfortune, knowing that every business has setbacks. But the losses kept piling up.

When one particularly risky investment fell through, Samuel was forced to sign over several important properties he had purchased, leaving him with little money to spend. When the money ran out, so did his friends' loyalty—they turned away and refused to help him. Instead of living large, Samuel now had to dismiss his servants, sell his possessions, and

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begin searching for someone who would hire him.

The collapse of his business couldn't have happened at a worse time, for the last of his money ran out just as the results of a severe famine struck the country. With people struggling just to feed themselves and their families, it was nearly impossible for Samuel to find a job. Swallowing his pride, he went to each of his old friends in turn, begging them for work or at least a meal. Everyone refused.

Desperate, he followed a wealthy man home and begged him for work, refusing to leave the man's house until he had given him a job. Unable to shake Samuel off, the man finally told him to go out and watch his pigs. If he hoped that Samuel—a Jew who believed that pigs were unclean animals—would be offended by such an offer and leave, he was mistaken. Too hopeless to turn down even this humiliation, Samuel agreed.

Where once he had lived in luxury, clothed in warm robes with plenty to eat, Samuel now slept in the mud with the pigs and fought them for the slops his master provided. Months passed. Each day the pigs grew fatter while he grew thinner.

At long last, his pride worn to the bone, Samuel decided he couldn't continue living like this. Thinking about his father's household, he realized that even the lowliest day laborers had been treated generously. He recalled the last meal he had eaten at home—roasted lamb, dripping with flavor, and hot, spicy vegetables. Even the scraps from such a dinner would be a feast now.

Samuel knew he no longer had the right to be considered his father's son and heir—he had rejected his father's love, turned his back on family honor, and then squandered everything he had gained. But if he could swallow his pride enough to beg a stranger for work even the lowliest Gentile would find offensive, he could return home, no matter how great his burden of guilt and shame.

Having made his decision, Samuel joined the crowd walking away from the famine-devastated land and retraced his steps to his homeland. When he had left home so long ago, he had been hopeful and cocksure that he would succeed. But now he realized that he had been a rebellious fool who cared only about getting his own way and taking every shortcut to success he could find.



*The Prodigal Son Feeding Swine* by Murillo.

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The closer Samuel got to home, the more nervous he became. He nearly turned back at every crossroads, regretting his parting words and actions more each time. To take his mind off his anxiety, Samuel prepared his speech, fitting words together until they sounded just right. "Master, I have sinned against the God of heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. I ask only that you allow me to work for a day's wages, as you would any destitute man."

He crested the final hill, surrounded by fellow travelers, and saw his father's house in the distance. The buildings and fields all looked the same, untouched by the famine that had ravaged Egypt where he had been living. Suddenly he felt filthy, standing in the road barefoot and wearing rags, with the dust and grime of travel unable to cover the bone-deep smell of the pigs. He couldn't take one more step. He knew he wasn't even worthy to approach his father's house, let alone ask for work in his fields and food from his table.

At that moment a far-off cry reached Samuel's ears. A man was running toward him, stumbling in his eagerness to cover the distance, not caring that his lack of propriety was unseemly for a man of his position. As the man came closer, Samuel realized with horror that it was his father. Panicked, he tried to hide among the crowd, but it was too late.



*The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Murillo.

With a shout of joy, his father reached him and pulled Samuel into his arms, heedless of the dirt soiling his fine robes. Ashamed, Samuel tried to kneel as he stumbled through the speech he had prepared. But his father would hear none of it. Taking Samuel's hand, his father removed the signet ring from his own finger and placed it on Samuel's finger, thus restoring his place as a son and heir.

Hugging and kissing him again and again, Samuel's father led him toward the house, calling loudly for the servants to prepare a bath and clean robes to be followed by a great feast. "Bring the calf, the one that has been specially fattened, and roast it for

tonight's dinner. We will have a glorious celebration tonight, for the son I thought was lost has returned!"

Tears streamed down Samuel's cheeks. He didn't deserve to be called his father's son. His actions had revealed his true character, rotted through with jealousy, rebelliousness, and selfish pride. He had thought of no one else in his determination to make his own way, to be free of his father and the obligations and restrictions required of a son. Yet here was the

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man he had treated so shamefully, acting as if Samuel had returned triumphant.

As if in a trance, Samuel felt himself being led to his old rooms, untouched all this time, then washed clean of his rebellious life and given new garments fit for an heir. At the feast that night, his father seated Samuel in the place of honor at his right hand, beaming with joy over his return. Plate after plate of delicious food was brought before them, and Samuel was served the best portions of every dish.

Samuel didn't know how to respond to his father's overwhelming generosity, which he didn't deserve and could never repay. He felt guilt and shame over how he had acted in the past. But every time he looked in his father's face, expecting to see pain or anger or disgust over Samuel's foolishness, he saw only love. Endless, perfect love. There was nothing Samuel could do to earn this love. In fact, he had done absolutely everything he could to make his father hate and reject him. But in spite of everything, his father loved him still.

Samuel reached out and clasped his father's hand. Words couldn't repay the debt he owed him. But perhaps his actions could. He vowed that from that moment on he would do everything he could to show his father that he was a changed man, thankful for his abundant love.



Photo of mosaic at Immanuel Church in Copenhagen, Denmark by Ib Rasmussen.

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Jeremiah walked in from the fields, brushing the dust of a hard day's work from his hands. Every day, little by little, he believed he was earning his father's love and respect. Now that Samuel was gone, it was only a matter of time until his father made him his partner as the sole heir.

As he neared the house, Jeremiah thought he heard music and laughter and smelled the rich aroma of roasting meat. He looked in the pen near the house where the prize calf was kept. Born the week Samuel had left, that calf had been fed the best grain and treated to a life of ease, destined to become the centerpiece of a great feast.

Jeremiah secretly hoped that the animal would grace the feast where he would be named his father's partner. After all, ever since Samuel's departure the old man's vitality had visibly declined. Surely it was only a matter of time until he could no longer run the business. And Jeremiah would be there, his father's logical successor.

But the pen stood empty. Jeremiah's cheeks flushed with anger. What exalted visitor had his father sacrificed the prize calf for? *His* calf? He reached the well to wash up, fuming inside. Stunts like this were what held the old man back from being truly great.

Drawing a bucket of clear, cool water up from the well, Jeremiah rinsed off his hands, then splashed water onto his warm face. There would be changes when he took his place as head of the family. All his father's charity and extravagant hospitality were bankrupting them. People had to earn what they got. That was what he had done, and it was what he would teach his children. Shaking the water from his hands, he hurried into the house.

When he reached the kitchen, Jeremiah wondered at the hustle and bustle, noting the skins of fine wine being carried by the servants. He shook his head. Just because some important visitor arrived at the last minute didn't mean that you pulled out the best of everything. Why, it was almost like his father was celebrating a wedding or the birth of a child!

He searched for his father's steward in the chaos and found him in the main hallway directing the preparations. He beckoned to the steward, who hurried over, beaming. "Jeremiah, the greatest thing has happened. Your brother has returned home!"

Jeremiah felt as though he had been hit in the stomach. This celebration was for Samuel? The lavish food, the finest wine, the prize calf—all for Samuel? Ignoring the steward's plea for him to join in the merriment, Jeremiah turned and stalked out of the house, clenching his fists to keep himself from hitting something.

He headed for the barns, looking for someplace private to vent his anger. Secretly, he had been glad the day Samuel made his audacious request. Not only did it remove his only rival, but it also weakened his father's position. Any other man with such a rebellious son would have disowned him on the spot, but not the old man. Now Samuel had returned, and his father had not only taken him back, but was celebrating as if he were returned from the dead!

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Jeremiah paced around the empty barn, trying to walk off his burning rage, trying to clear his head enough to figure how this altered his plans. Surely his father wouldn't reinstate Samuel as heir, not after what the ungrateful fool had done, dishonoring the family by running off with his inheritance.

Behind him, the door creaked. Spinning around, Jeremiah met his father's eyes. The man was dressed in his best finery and looking happier than Jeremiah had ever seen him. Jealousy coursed through him.

"Son, your brother has returned to us. Won't you come celebrate with me?"

Jeremiah clenched his jaw, trying to find words that were respectful enough to use with the patriarch of his family. Breathing in deeply, he asked, "Haven't I worked hard for you all these years?"

His father nodded.

"And in all that time, have I ever disobeyed one of your orders?"

"You have always been a model son," his father agreed.

"Yet as a reward for all my efforts, you have never even given me a young goat to use to celebrate with my friends." Jeremiah paused, trying to keep his anger in check.

"But then this son of yours, who used up your wealth partying with sinners in a foreign land, returns and you serve him your prize calf!" The words, unspoken, hung in the air between them: *Don't I deserve special treatment more than he does? Haven't I earned it?*

His father came close and put a hand on Jeremiah's arm. "Son, you act as though you must earn my love and respect, but you have always had them. You and I have been side by side all these years." He waited, radiating love and warmth while searching Jeremiah's face. "This is the time to celebrate your brother's return, for nothing could be more miraculous than if he had been raised from the dead." He let his hand drop.

"It's your choice, Jeremiah. But it would make me very happy to have you at my side on this special day." With a smile, Jeremiah's father left, the swish of his ornate robes



*The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt.



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the only sound in the empty barn.

Alone again, Jeremiah took a deep breath and held it, finally exhaling with a long, loud sigh. His father's words had taken the sting out of the perceived slight. Now he had a choice. Would he accept his father's love, a love so great that it rejoiced even at the return of a rebellious and disrespectful son? Or would he resentfully persist in his anger over the grace given to one so undeserving?

### GOING DEEPER

1. Read the parable as told by Jesus in Luke 15:11–32 and compare it to the story you've just read.
2. Why did Samuel want to take his inheritance and leave his family? Why did Samuel's new business fail?
3. Why was it so difficult for Samuel to return home and ask for his father's forgiveness? Why do you think so many people cling to their sins instead of going to God and repenting?
4. Did the father treat his older son fairly? How did the father show love to his older son? Describe a time when you resented the joy someone else was feeling.
5. Read John 15:1–8. What can you achieve of lasting value if you are separated from God? How does the story you've just read illustrate this point?
6. Most translations of the Bible call this story the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Look up the meaning of the word *prodigal* in a dictionary. How does this word describe the young man in the story? How might the word *prodigal* be used to describe his father's love?
7. What does this parable tell us about how God feels about a sinner who repents? What does Luke 15:7 say about how heaven reacts when a person accepts God's free gift of salvation?