

“I have known Pastor Don Meinberg for over 7 years, since the time he planted Reflections Christian Fellowship in Southern California. During that time, I have seen his energy and enthusiasm, not only for God but also for kids. I have read his *Reaching New Heights* series and believe that they are great books for young people going through the tough pre-teen and teenage years. The daily topics are what middle school and young high school kids may experience for the first time, and his format will definitely help kids learn how to use the Bible to deal with problems. These books are needed, especially in today’s world.”

—**Jeff Ludington**,
Lead Pastor at Generations Church;
author of *Frustrated: How the Bible Resolves Life’s Tough Questions*

“I have known Pastor Don for over 25 years. He has a true love for Jesus and especially for kids. He has worked many years with middle school and high school kids in building them up in the Lord. His book series *Reaching New Heights* is a must-read for any young person going through the difficult years of puberty and beyond. It is a unique book series that gives kids God-centered advice on some difficult topics that they might be experiencing for the first time. Every middle school and young high school student needs this book series to help them answer the tough questions of life in a Christ-centered way. It will bless kids and parents alike!”

—**Mark Bridgeford**,
Elder, Summit Ridge Church, Rancho Cucamonga, California

“*Reaching New Heights* would be a valuable resource for any pastor, youth worker, or parent’s library. As adolescent young brains are developing, they need time to think through the issues of their lives and experience God speaking directly to them in His word. These amazing books provide such a great resource and would bless the lives and homes of Christians with

clarity and substance. Best of all, I can see this series being the catalyst for opening lines of communication and dialogue within families and churches. It is highly recommended.”

—**Tommy Peterson**,
Youth Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church

“As a fifteen-year-old girl, I find that these books fit right in with the things that happen in school and church all the time. It helps to read what the Bible tells us to do in all these situations and to see the solutions to these difficult issues of life. *Reaching New Heights* contains a wide range of topics and hits the specific audience where things are very relative. It provides Scripture for different learning types and is well-laid-out for each question and answer.”

—**Tori Hitchcock**,
Escondido, California

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

GOD'S ANSWERS TO YOUNG TEENS' QUESTIONS

VOLUME 2: APRIL–JUNE

DON MEINBERG

LUCIDBOOKS

Reaching New Heights

God's Answers to Young Teens' Questions

Volume 2: April–June

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to give kids in middle school to high school between the ages of 10 and 15 a place to find God's answers for problems they face daily. There are numerous books and other publications that focus only on high school or college age kids and the struggles and problems they face regarding drugs and alcohol, dating, sex, jobs, and career choices. But my research found very few books that concentrate solely on questions that young teens or preteens face in their everyday lives. Their issues may be similar to the topics facing high school and college age kids but from a totally different perspective. Younger kids may be facing some of these issues for the very first time and are confused and frustrated. Also, their questions are more likely to be about lying to elders, cheating on tests, new friendships, temptations, and difficult choices. This book gives them an avenue to learn what God says about these issues and how to apply God's answers to their lives in a language they can understand.

The book is formatted with an advice-column look with the main topic at the top of the page and the related issue or question directly below. The issues or questions are mainly presented as stories that young teens might be experiencing. But the beauty of this book is that young teens or preteens can revise the story content to fit a similar problem or issue they are encountering that is related to the main topic. They can do that for any of the main topics in the book.

Following each question or issue is a section called "What God Says." It includes the book, chapter, and verse in the Bible that directly relates to the question and main topic. Sometimes, a paraphrase of the verse is used.

It may or may not include the entire verse, depending on the issue. I paraphrase some verses to make it easier for the reader to understand and apply the appropriate meaning of the verse to the subject or question. The Bible translation used in this book is the New Living Translation, chosen for its accuracy and easy-to-read format.

Below the Bible's solution to the issue is the application of God's answer. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult to interpret what the Bible means and apply it to the problem at hand. This section does that for the reader, breaking down God's words into practical terms that young teens can understand and use to solve their own dilemma. Each answer is unique to the question presented and God's solution to that issue.

Once the young teen has read the issue, learned God's solution, and understood its meaning by applying the verse, they are ready for the next section called "Questions to Ponder." Here, we want our young students to write down their thoughts and notes on what they just read. Each topic includes a couple of questions to guide students along in their thinking. This section is a tool that can be used for open discussion among a group of young teens, or it can be used as a tool for individuals to write down their own thoughts and ideas and how they apply to their own situation.

At the top of each journal page is a motto that directly relates to the main topic. The purpose of the motto is to give the reader one final thought on the main topic and hopefully inspire them to remember this topic and solution for a long time. The young teen may not remember the story or the Bible verse, but chances are good that they will remember the motto because it is only one line directed exclusively at the main topic.

There are very few (if any) books available for young teens and preteens ages 10 to 15 that relate directly to them and their needs from a biblical perspective. It takes those difficult issues—prayers not answered, lack of communication with parents—for young teens to understand and apply God's word. This is a book for their level of maturity written primarily for their age group, focusing totally on questions and problems in their lives with useful God-inspired answers. This book will teach young teens right from wrong with a biblical stance on tough issues that would make even adults

cringe. This book could become a source of enlightenment for students and an answered prayer for the adults in their lives.

This book can be used in a variety of ways: as a daily devotional for a year, as an advice textbook, as a diary of solutions to teens' problems, or as a memorable book of stories with God's solutions.

APRIL 1

HELPING KIDS WITH TEMPTATION

Q: My friend and I go to church every week and to youth group every Tuesday night. The problem is that she goes to a different middle school, and she has made friends with a group of kids that enjoy going to the beach every Sunday morning and going to \$2 movie nights every Tuesday night. They have asked my friend numerous times to join them for each outing, but up to this point, she has refused. But she told me last Sunday that the temptation to go with her friends is getting stronger, and now she doesn't know what to do. I'm afraid if she stops going to church once, she might stop going for a long time.

What God Says: Matthew 26:41 *Keep alert and pray. Otherwise, temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak.**

A: Temptation and peer pressure are a tough combination to overcome, but nothing is impossible with God. Tell your friend to be strong and pray to God to give her strength to tell her friends that Sunday mornings and Tuesday nights are busy, but she would love to spend time with them on another day of the week. If they agree, they are good friends who understand. If not, they might not be the right friends for her. Tell her to start with a prayer to God to keep her strong in her commitment to church.

Questions to ponder:

How do you help your friends deal with their temptations?

Give an example or two.

APRIL 2

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO GOSSIP

Q: My sister is always gossiping to her friends about me. She's two years younger than I am (I'm 12), and she's always listening to my conversations with my friends and then spreading the gossip to her friends. Sometimes, she takes a conversation and totally exaggerates the context and spreads that gossip around her school. When her friends come over, they are either giving me strange looks or laughing at me behind my back. I talked to my mom, but she just laughs it off as no big deal. This kid's ruining my life, and I need her to stop.

What God Says: Proverbs 20:19 *A gossip tells secrets so don't hang around with someone who talks too much.**

A: In the verse above, God is teaching you that you need to stay as far away from your sister as possible. God says it's a terrible sin not only to gossip but also to lie about the conversation she's gossiping about. Gossiping mostly grows out of laziness. Your sister has nothing else to talk about, so she talks about you to get attention from her friends. If your mom is no help, then you need to sit down with your sister and get this resolved. If that doesn't work, then you need to make sure your sister can't hear you or read anything about you that could start her gossiping. God hates gossip, especially gossip that hurts others.

Questions to ponder:

Do you have friends who gossip about others?

How do you handle kids who gossip?

Q: My younger brother is a good kid with a Christian heart. The problem is that he gets picked on by kids in his class. My brother is short and wears glasses. His clothes are uncool, doesn't swear, and is not mean to other kids. He cares about his grades, and the teachers love him because he's very respectful. He doesn't fit in with the other kids who are mean and disrespectful. I would watch his back at school, but we don't go to the same school. I'm afraid he might change because he's getting tired of being picked on.

What God Says: 1 Timothy 4:12 *“Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”*

A: It sounds like your brother is an excellent example of living for Christ even at his young age. The key is to make sure he doesn't get discouraged being in the faith in Christ. To keep your brother from getting discouraged, you need to constantly encourage him and praise him for his faith. As long as your brother sees the light at the end of the tunnel, he will continue to be faithful. Also, pray with your brother to give him courage and strength to withstand Satan's temptation to change his ways.

Questions to ponder:

Why do you think bigger kids always seem to pick on smaller kids?

Does this happen at your school?

Explain.

APRIL 4

DEALING WITH KIDS LOSING FAITH

Q: I have a good friend who has always been a church-going Christian girl. But about three months ago, many bad things began to happen to her. She took a nasty fall while skiing and severely broke her ankle. Then, her older brother got stabbed in the neck by a carjacker trying to steal his car. Just last week, her dad lost his job, and they don't have the money for the mortgage. My friend had been praying to God for help, but every week something else bad happens, and she is losing faith in God.

What God Says: Isaiah 26:3 *"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you."*

A: Faith in God normally brings peace of mind and heart because we know we belong to Him and that one day, all this pain and suffering will end. She needs a friend like you to pray with her and comfort her. Always remind your friend that God loves her and that this suffering is only temporary, but her faith in Christ will allow her to live with Him forever. Get her involved in church for more positive reinforcement.

Questions to ponder:

When is your faith the weakest?

Give examples of times of weak faith.

Q: I have a best friend in the seventh grade, and we've been friends for six years. I tell her all her secrets, and she tells me all her secrets. One day, I told her a secret that I had never told anyone. While I was in the principal's office waiting for a tardy slip, I saw an algebra test we would be taking the next day laying on the floor. I don't know what I was thinking, but I picked up the test, took it home and solved all the problems. At school the next day, I took the identical test and got 100%. About a week after I told my friend this, she told the algebra teacher, and I got an F for cheating. She has begged me to forgive her for squealing, but I just can't. I am so angry.

What God Says: Luke 23:34 *Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people because they do not know what they are doing."**

A: I agree with you that what your friend did was wrong, and she probably damaged your trust in her. But repairing that trust and forgiving your friend are two different things. Jesus was mocked, beaten, and crucified on the cross, and yet He still found forgiveness for those evil people. Now I know we are only human and not God, but to be Christ-like, we need to learn to forgive like Jesus. Be cautious telling your friend about future secrets, but forgive her for her mistake if she is truly sorry. And don't ever cheat like that again!

Questions to ponder:

Are you a forgiving person?

Describe a situation that has happened to you that was difficult for you to forgive.

APRIL 6

DEALING WITH HYPOCRITICAL KIDS

Q: My friend goes to church, sings in the kids' choir, and even helps out with the infants on Sunday morning. It would seem that she's a model Christian girl, but when she's at school or in the gym, she's a totally different person. She swears constantly, saying the f-word or the s-word, and she's always saying mean things about others behind their backs. When I ask her about it, she just says it's different at school than at church. How can I convince her that she's just being a hypocrite?

What God Says: Titus 1:16 *Such people claim they know God, but they deny Him by the way they live. They are despicable and disobedient, worthless for doing any good.**

A: The bottom line is that your friend is consistently being disobedient to God by her works and actions outside of church. Therefore, her claim of knowing Him is meaningless. Remember, God knows our hearts and our intentions. Jesus blasted the Pharisees and the religious leaders of His day for being hypocrites, so we know what God thinks of those types of people. Explain all this to your friend and tell her to be consistent in her Christian walk, and then God will bless her.

Question to ponder:

Why are some kids such hypocrites?

APRIL 7

LOSING THINGS

Q: I have a tendency to lose things all the time. I have lost my purse many times because I forgot where I left it. I've lost sweatshirts and sweaters because I take them off when it gets hot and forget where I put them. I lose my earrings and other jewelry because I never put them back where they belong. Now, my parents won't buy me anything that I want because they're afraid I will lose it. I don't know how to change this fault about me. When I get caught up in an activity or conversation and lose my focus, I just forget where I put things. I really need help.

What God Says: 2 John 1:8 *Watch out that you do not lose the prize for which you have been working so hard. Be diligent so you will receive the full reward.**

A: When we lose things, the reason is usually that we have lost focus on our responsibilities. We get in trouble when our minds drift away from God and to the world. God has rewards for us in heaven if we don't lose focus on Him on this earth. Our salvation is secure, but our "prize" is in jeopardy when we lose focus on Him. The key is to always stay focused on what is important, especially God and His Word. And you need to be responsible and focused on your belongings. Once you start showing responsibility, your parents will start trusting you again and buying you new things. The key is FOCUS!

Questions to ponder:

Do you have a problem losing things?

If not, what is your system for not losing things?

DEALING WITH MEAN KIDS

Q: Sometimes, it's difficult to understand why some kids are so mean. Take this one kid in my school. He is so loud and obnoxious to other kids and extremely disrespectful to the teachers. He is always getting in trouble for being mouthy and never has anything nice to say about anybody. At lunch and when we are playing games outside, he cheats all the time just to win, and when someone confronts him, he either pushes them or tries to hurt them. No one ever talks to this kid, so he has no friends. Why are there kids like this who act so mean?

What God Says: 1 Peter 3:8 *All of you should be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds.**

A: Everything this kid does goes against what Christ teaches us in the Bible. But it might not be this kid's fault. Maybe, he can't love or be nice to anyone because no one at home has taught him how to love or be nice. Young kids are a product of their parents and their environment. If everyone is mean to him around his home or neighborhood, then all he knows is mean. The way you can help this kid is to show him Christian love and understanding and the blessings you get from them. Through your actions, he may learn how to treat people with Christian love.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with mean kids in your life?

Give an example of one mean kid you know.

Q: I'm in the seventh grade, and I am constantly being ridiculed because I love the cable shows on the Disney channel and television shows on Nickelodeon. I watch them every day. I have a Disney lunch box, and I'm always wearing various Disney T-shirts and socks. Kids at school ridicule me by calling me "wuss" or "baby" just because I love Disney. I don't think there is anything wrong with liking Disney or Disneyland at my age, but just because it's not popular with the other kids, I get ridiculed. How can I get it to stop?

What God Says: Psalm 89:50–51 *“Consider, Lord, how your servants are disgraced! I carry in my heart the insults of so many people. Your enemies have mocked me, O LORD.”*

A: You always need to stand up for what you believe in. If you are being ridiculed for your faith (as the verse above indicates) or for liking a television show, you can't allow others to dictate what you think or how you feel. Don't ever change what you believe in as long as it is good and right. Stay strong in your faith and in your beliefs. Don't let insults and persecution get in the way of something you love.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever been ridiculed for anything? Explain.
If not, have you ridiculed others? Explain.

APRIL 10

SIBLING FIGHTING

Q: I just can't get along with my younger sister. Unfortunately, we share the same bedroom because our house is small. We are constantly fighting about everything, and she is always taking my things without asking me. She never gives me any privacy, and she listens in on my phone conversations. She argues with me for the dumbest reasons just to get me in trouble. I know I should love her because she is my sister, but I can't stand being around her. I don't know what it will take to stop our fighting all the time.

What God Says: Ephesians 4:26–27 *Don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the devil.**

A: First of all, God doesn't want you to be fighting with your sister. As obvious as this sounds, most kids do not think about it when they are mad. You are letting your anger toward your sister gain control of you, and that is wrong in God's eyes. As hard as it may seem, you are the older sister, and you need to teach your younger sister right from wrong in a Christian manner. I know it never seems fair to the older sibling to have that responsibility, but God will richly bless you for that effort.

Questions to ponder:

Do you have brothers or sisters you fight with?
Explain your relationships with your siblings.

APRIL 11

DEALING WITH LAZY FRIENDS

Q: My friend across the street is extremely lazy. During our summer break, she basically wasted the entire summer away. Most of the other neighborhood kids were babysitting or mowing lawns for extra cash, but this kid did absolutely nothing. Her dad even offered her a decent weekly allowance for doing easy chores around the house, but she refused. She slept 13 to 14 hours a day, watched TV, played with her cat, and did basically nothing all summer. She is a good friend, and we've had fun times together in the past, but I wish I could get her to be more active and not so lazy.

What God Says: Proverbs 10:5 *A wise youth works hard all summer; a youth who sleeps away the hour of opportunity brings shame.**

A: God is very clear about young people who waste their summer away. Laziness brings shame to them and especially to God. God has blessed each and every one of us with talents and abilities that need to be utilized. You need to help your friend find her talents and motivate her to start using them instead of being lazy. Get her involved in Christian summer camps or activities with the church. She needs a strong motivator, and God is just the one to do that.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with lazy friends?

How do you try to help them?

Q: There is a bully who goes to my school. And at least three times a week, he waits for me at a corner right by the school as I'm riding my bike. He stops me and demands that I give him my lunch money or he will beat me up. He then threatens to hurt my little sister if I tell my parents or a teacher. One time, I forgot my lunch money, so when I had nothing to give him, he started pushing me around and threatened to punch my teeth out if I ever forgot it again. I'm afraid to tell anyone because, knowing this bully, he will try to hurt my little sister if he gets the chance.

What God Says: Proverbs 1:33 *But all who listen to me will live in peace and safety, unafraid of harm.**

A: This kid is a classic bully who tries to take advantage of young, helpless kids. God hates bullying from anyone, especially those who prey on the young and innocent. You need to go to God in prayer and ask Him for help and strength to deal with this situation. God will always protect you and take harm away from you if you ask Him with a sincere heart. You need to tell your parents or a teacher right away because this scare tactic will never go away. Then, I suggest you go to school with other kids or find a big brother or older kid to go with you and your sister in case you get confronted. Be strong and courageous, and God will watch over you so you will never be alone.

Questions to ponder:

- Have you ever been threatened? Explain.
- If not, how would you react if you were threatened?

APRIL 13

DEALING WITH LOUD PEOPLE

Q: My stepdad has a very loud voice. My neighborhood has many houses on the block, and they are very close to each other. When he gets mad at me or my mom or sister, he starts yelling at the top of his voice. During the summer, we keep the windows open, and when he gets loud, my neighbors around the corner can hear him. It is embarrassing when my friends next door tell me everything they heard from my stepdad. How can I get him to quiet down when he's angry or stop his yelling altogether?

What God Says: Ecclesiastes 9:17 *But even so, the quiet words of a wise person are better than the shouts of a foolish king.**

A: Does your stepdad realize how loud he is? Maybe he doesn't hear well so he needs to talk loudly just to hear himself. God teaches us that wise people speak their words calmly and quietly, and foolish people are loud and obnoxious. If you can, speak to your stepdad and respectfully ask him to lower his tone or control his anger. Unfortunately, you can't force someone to change, but ask God to get through to him to change his tone.

Questions to ponder:

Are any of your friends loud?

How do you deal with them?

APRIL 14

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO LIE

Q: I have a friend I met from youth soccer who is a very nice person. He hangs out with another kid most of the time, and they are best friends. The problem is that the other kid is a big troublemaker, and my new friend is always lying for him. When the other kid was accused of stealing things from a store, my friend lied for him as an alibi. When this kid vandalized a wall, my friend again lied for him, telling the police a different story. And he's constantly lying at school for this kid when he gets in fights or takes other people's things. I'm afraid my new friend is going down the wrong road when he's with this troublemaker.

What God Says: Proverbs 11:3 *Good people are guided by their honesty; treacherous people are destroyed by their dishonesty.**

A: God does not approve of lying. He tells us in the Ten Commandments not to lie. But unfortunately, that's exactly what your friend is doing. Protecting this troublemaker by lying hurts both your friend and the other kid. You need to find a way to get your friend away from the troublemaker, because you are right. He will go down the wrong road. Spend more one-on-one time with him away from the other kid. Introduce him to God and kindly explain to him that what he's doing is wrong. Tell him the troublemaker is obviously using him to get himself out of trouble, and that's no friendship. Hopefully, his eyes will be opened, and the lying can stop.

Questions to ponder:

What is your opinion of kids who lie for other kids who are troublemakers?

How could you help?

Q: I think I am being taken advantage of by all my friends because I'm smart and responsible in doing my homework. Every day, at least one friend asks me to copy the homework sheet from the night before. They all want to study with me so I can tell them the answers that I think will be on the test. The worst yet was when a couple of friends asked me to move my test paper to one side so they could copy my answers. It seems like it's always a one-way street. I'm supposed to help them get good grades, but they don't do anything for me. I'm tired of being used, but I'm pretty quiet and shy and don't want to lose them as friends.

What God Says: 2 Corinthians 11:20–21 *You put up with it when they make you their slaves, take everything you have, take advantage of you, put on airs, and slap you in the face. I'm ashamed to say that we were not strong enough to do that.**

A: There is no question that your so-called friends are using you. A friendship is a give-and-take arrangement, not a one-way street. God says that you are acting weak by giving in to their behavior. You need to stand your ground and say no. Tell them that you will not cheat for them anymore or do their homework. If they leave you, they were never your friends to begin with. You deserve better than that. Find some friends who like you for who you are and not for what you can do for them. And yes, you may be alone for a while, but take courage, for God is with you, and with His help, you'll have true friends in no time.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever been used?

If yes, explain.

If no, how would you react if you were?

APRIL 16

HELPING FRIENDS WITH ABUSE

Q: I'm getting sick and tired of hearing the verbal abuse my friend gets from her stepmom. Whenever I'm over at her house, her stepmom is constantly yelling at her and calling her terrible names for not doing chores or making dinner or feeding the dog. And my friend tells me it gets much worse after I leave because her language gets much more vulgar. And her stepmom does nothing but watch TV and drink alcohol. How can I help my friend out of this abusive situation?

What God Says: Psalm 40:1 *"I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and He turned to me and heard my cry."*

A: Your friend needs to turn to God and ask Him for guidance, wisdom, and strength to put up with her stepmom. If she asks God for help, He will hear her and give her comfort. Talk with her, pray with her, and God will find the right solution to help your friend. God always listens to cries for help.

Question to ponder:

How would you help a friend who is being abused at home?

APRIL 17

NON-COMPETITIVENESS

Q: I am an extremely non-competitive person. When I play a game at school or at home with my brothers, I could absolutely not care less if I win or lose. Last month, I was involved in an all-county spelling bee. I didn't care about the spelling bee, so I didn't try. I never studied the words, so I lost in the third round. I was probably the best speller there, but I truly didn't care about the competition. I am not about winning or losing because it matters little to me. My parents think I'm wrong and that I need to care. What do you think?

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 9:24 *Remember that in a race, everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You must run in such a way that you will win.**

A: Competition drives people to improve themselves and sharpen their skills. God uses people to be competitive in order to do his work here on earth. God says that being passive and apathetic in living for Him is sin. However, being overly competitive can also be wrong. You need to find a place in the middle. You need to take an interest in your talents and try to be the best you can be. That's what God expects from you. It's the same with your faith. If you took the same attitude and didn't care about doing God's work, then how would you win the race of life in bringing God's word to people?

Questions to ponder:

What do you think about competition?
Give good and bad points.

APRIL 18

HELPING KIDS WITH A DEFORMITY

Q: There is a girl at school who unfortunately has no friends because she was born with an unusual bone deformity. Some of the bones in her face and arms and legs grew outward, causing them to poke out of her body. So her face looks very different from other kids, and she always wears long sleeved shirts and baggy pants to hide the other areas. She's been called cruel names such as "freak" and "weirdo," and she's always alone. I'd like to help her or at least talk to her, but I don't want her to think I'm just feeling sorry for her.

What God Says: Psalm 34:18 *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.**

A: People who look different or act differently because of a deformity will, unfortunately, be the subject of ridicule. This girl sounds depressed and probably feels that she's all alone in this big world. But the power of the Lord's presence coupled with the sensitivity of a good person can bring healing and comfort. Talk to her as a friend, and listen to her. Help her find a support group of other kids with the same challenges. Get her involved with them, and I'm sure she'll find comfort knowing she's not alone. And most of all, ask God for His strength and mercy.

Questions to ponder:

How would you help a friend who is deformed?

What would you do or say?

Q: I worked day and night on my baseball skills in order to make the middle school baseball team. I don't have as much talent as the other kids, but I work hard in order to get better. I went to tryouts and worked my butt off, fielding grounders and shagging flies. I struggled a bit at the plate, but I thought I did good enough to make the team. When the coach posted the names of who made the team, my name was not on the list. I was so upset that I wanted to cry, but I was afraid of what the other kids would think. I didn't know what emotion to show because I was feeling them all (sadness, anger, etc.). All I know is that I was never as sad as I was at that moment.

What God Says: Psalm 34:15 *"The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help."*

A: Society tells us that boys at any age are not allowed to cry. The good news is that God listens to the cries of our heart, and He is always there to comfort us. What you need to do is talk to God and ask Him for strength to deal with this. Then you need to figure out why you didn't make the team and start practicing those areas in order to make the team next year. Or God may be telling you that baseball is not your sport and you need to find something else to excel in. Either way, God will lead you in the right direction, and He will comfort you.

Questions to ponder:

Are you an emotional person?

If yes, how do you control your emotions?

If no, how do you handle emotional people?

APRIL 20

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO KEEP GRUDGES

Q: My friend and I were both trying out for the basketball team. The first nine players had already been selected, and they had one spot open for a reserve guard. The choice was between my friend and me. Now, he's a little bit better at dribbling and shooting, and I'm a better passer and defender. Overall, he's probably a little bit better than I am. But when the decision came, the coach chose me over him. My friend was really upset, and since that day, he began to ignore me. Days and weeks have gone by, and he still won't talk to me or play with me like he used to. Basketball season is over, and he's still holding a grudge against me, and I don't know what to do.

What God Says: Mark 11:25 *"When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."*

A: God is all about forgiveness and totally against grudges. There are many places in the Bible that tell us to forgive our brother or sister, no matter what the circumstances are. You need to continue to try to be there for your friend. Get involved in other activities with him (not basketball) and start rebuilding the friendship. If that works, then in time you can start playing basketball with him again and help each other make the team next year. If it doesn't work, then his heart is very hard, and you may need to move on. Pray to God!

Questions to ponder:

What is your opinion of kids who keep grudges?

Do you have a friend who keeps grudges?

Explain.

Q: I have to admit that I'm extremely jealous of my best friend. She is so pretty with her long blond hair and cute smile. She's got perfect teeth, and I know I'll need braces next year. She wears cool clothes with the in brands, while most of the time, I have to wear hand-me-downs from my older sister. She is popular with all the boys and girls, and I think people like me only because she is my friend. She gets good grades, while I struggle to get Cs. She's a good friend, and I like her a lot, but I can't get over my jealous feelings toward her.

What God Says: Proverbs 14:30 *A relaxed attitude lengthens life; jealousy rots it away.**

A: Jealousy is a deadly sin, and as God says, it rots away at your life. What you must always keep in mind is that everything we are and everything we have belong to God. He is totally in charge of our lives if we allow Him to be, and He made each and every one of us unique in His own way. Turn your jealousy into admiration, and it will change your life. Pray to God to help you do this, for He will help you. Get rid of the bitterness and jealousy, and live your life with a relaxed, positive disposition.

Questions to ponder:

- Are you a jealous person?
- If yes, why and about whom?
- If you don't think so, how do you know?

APRIL 22

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO DON'T LISTEN

Q: My friend has a problem listening to people. When anyone talks to him, he looks as if he's listening, but in actuality, he doesn't comprehend a word the person said. It really bugs me when I'm telling him important things about homework or important dates, and 30 minutes later, he's asking me about the same thing. He struggles in his schoolwork for the same reason. I'm not exactly sure what he's thinking when people are talking to him, but it's definitely not about what we are saying. He's a good friend, but I can't take this anymore.

What God Says: 1 Samuel 15:22 *"Samuel replied, 'What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to His voice?'"*
*Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to Him is much better than offering the fat of rams.**

A: God wants us to listen to Him and others attentively and to obey His commands. Listening to God through His word or through other people is critical, and listening to others as they're speaking is right. Tell your friend how frustrated you are when he's not listening to you. Active listening is important, not only with people but also with God. With God's help, your friend may become more focused on the words being spoken to him. Be active listeners!

Questions to ponder:

Do you have friends who don't listen?

If yes, how do you deal with them?

If no, what would you do if your friend stopped listening to you?

Q: My parents got a divorce a couple of years ago. My mom just started seeing this new guy about six months ago. The problem is that I just can't seem to show her boyfriend any respect. When he tries to talk to me, I usually roll my eyes, say a sassy remark back, and then leave the room. If he ever asks me to do something, I yell something nasty and stomp out. Anytime we are in the same room, a fight usually starts, with me instigating it. I know I should be more respectful, but I can't get these negative feelings away from me.

What God Says: 1 Peter 2:17 *Show respect for everyone. Love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show respect for the king.**

A: It's very difficult for a child when their parents get a divorce and their mom or dad starts dating someone else. In the child's eyes, the new person is not their parent and never will be, so it's sometimes difficult to be respectful. But God teaches us to be respectful to everyone, no matter the circumstances. God expects us to show Christian love to all people, so that's what you need to do. Be patient, and give this person a chance to be a friend, and hopefully, a positive relationship might unfold. Besides, the situation you're in is not his fault. Pray to God to remove your anger and bitterness so you can be more respectful.

Questions to ponder:

Why is respect so important?

Do you agree with God's teaching on respect?

APRIL 24

DEALING WITH SCARED KIDS WHO TAKE RISKS

Q: My next-door neighbor's friend has an abusive dad. He tends to get drunk every night, drinking hard liquor while watching television. Her mom works nights, so my friend needs to make dinner and clean the house. If dinner is late, he yells at her. If the house is messy, he yells at her, even if she's doing her homework. Finally, one night she had enough. When he started yelling at her, she got the courage to talk back to him, telling him to get his own dinner. She yelled at him as loud as he normally yells at her, except her language was clean. He threatened to hurt her if she talked to him that way again, so now she's scared to death that when he drinks, he might get physically abusive with her.

What God Says: 1 Samuel 17:37 *The LORD saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear, and He will save me from this Philistine.**

A: Sometimes, a child needs to stand up against an abusive parent. Now, it's time for your next-door neighbor's friend to pray. Pray for strength to stand up for what is right; pray for wisdom to know how to handle the next verbal assault, and pray for courage not to be scared to take a risk. She needs to also pray that her dad will change this abusive behavior. God listens and heals the oppressed. You just need to ask for His help. As the verse above says, God will save you from difficult situations.

Questions to ponder:

Why is it frightening for kids to take risks?

Do you have friends who are scared to take risks?

Explain.

Q: About three months ago, my mom died in a tragic automobile accident. Someone who was driving while drunk hit her. He ran a red light and hit her squarely on the driver's side of the car. My mom and I were very close, almost like sisters. After she died, I stopped going to church. I blamed God for taking my mom at such a young age. I still cry every night because I miss my mom terribly. I can't seem to go back to church. I still feel it's all God's fault that this happened. It seems like everyone has tried to get me to go back to church, but I refuse. I know I'm being stubborn, but I can't get over my feeling against God.

What God Says: Jeremiah 3:22 *"My wayward children,' says the LORD, 'come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts.'"*

A: Sometimes, kids and adults alike get confused when tragedy strikes. God did not cause a drunk driver to run a red light and kill your mom. The driver made his own choice to get drunk and then drive. God is not at fault for what happened to your mom, but He's always there to comfort your crying heart. Don't be mad at God. All He wants to do is console you, hold you, and love you. As the passage says, go back to God, and He will heal you.

Questions to ponder:

Why are people so stubborn at times?

Are you sometimes stubborn?

Explain.

Q: My parents have been married for 15 years. My mom is always telling me how much she loves dad and what a great relationship they have. She has never had anything but positive things to say about dad, and I can see that he loves her, too. About two weeks ago, I found out that she has been having an affair with another man for more than a year. She told me that she really has been miserable in her marriage with dad and she needed someone to fill a void. For all these years, she lied to me, telling me everything was great between them. Now I don't trust anything she says on any subject.

What God Says: Psalm 125:1 *“Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever.”*

A: Trust is such a precious commodity, more priceless than a string of pearls. Once a trust is broken, it is extremely hard to repair. But one thing you do know is that you can always trust God for anything in your life. Trust God with this problem, and ask Him for guidance. It will take time for you to trust your mom again. But give her a chance to prove to you that she is trustworthy. God gives us all many second chances when we fail Him. We need to learn to do the same.

Questions to ponder:

How important is trust to you?

Why?

Q: I just turned 14 years old, and I decided I want a belly button ring. But when I told my parents, they were very angry and told me no. I already have two piercings on each ear, and they didn't seem to have a problem with that. A few of my friends got their belly buttons pierced, and it looks really cool. I don't know why my parents are making such a big deal about this. And besides, it's my body, and if I want to pierce it, I should be allowed to do so. Why should my parents, God, or anyone else tell me what to do with my body?

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 *Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.**

A: Your body does not belong to you. Your body belongs to God. God created your body when you were born. God has granted you free will to do whatever you want to your body. But you also have the responsibility to treat your body in the manner that God intended. As the passage says, you must honor God with your body. God does not approve of body piercing. It degrades the body through mutilation like the pagans in the Old Testament used to do. Pray to God before piercing your belly button. Use your free will wisely to give glory to God our father.

Questions to ponder:

- What is your opinion of body piercing?
- Would you ever pierce your body (other than your ears)?
- Why or why not?

HELPING FRIENDS WHO CAN'T TALK TO PARENTS

Q: My friend has a difficult time communicating with her parents about anything. Her parents are very old-fashioned, and they worry about everything. So when my friend tells them about a problem with a friend or her own problem, they immediately start jumping to conclusions, thinking only the worst. They are so gloomy about life in general and especially kids in general that they judge kids before learning all the facts. So my friend has decided not to talk to her parents about anything.

What God Says: Proverbs 18:13 *What a shame, what folly to give advice before listening to the facts.**

A: It is a shame that your friend's parents judge a situation before getting all the facts. It discourages your friend from wanting to communicate with them and completely destroys the relationship. But there must be a reason why her parents are so judgmental about kids. Maybe they had a bad experience as kids or grew up in a bad neighborhood that causes them to be overly protective. Ask her to talk to her parents about why they are like that. A productive conversation might open up the line of communication, allowing them to talk more easily about other things. God teaches us that we must listen to all the facts before saying anything.

Questions to ponder:

How can you help friends who can't talk to their parents?

What advice would you give?

APRIL 29

MAKING EXCUSES

Q: I sometimes make way too many excuses when things don't go right in my life. If I fail a test, it's the teacher's fault for not teaching us right. If my team loses in soccer, it's the other kids' fault for not playing hard enough. Whenever I don't do the chores my parents ask, it's always because I had something better to do. I never blame myself for anything because I truly feel it is never my fault. I even make excuses for my friends when they do things wrong. I guess I don't see anything wrong with making excuses for things that I believe are not my fault.

What God Says: 1 Peter 1:17 *Remember that the heavenly father to whom you pray has no favorites when he judges. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of Him during your time as foreigners here on earth.**

A: You might be able to fool your parents and teachers or your friends with your excuses, but you can never fool God. You see, God knows your heart, and He knows the truth. And He will judge you on what you do and not what excuses you make. You need to learn to take responsibility for your actions and stop making excuses. Unfortunately, you are fooling no one but yourself, and you are living a lie. Making excuses is a coward's way out of responsibility. Be true to yourself and stop the excuses.

Questions to ponder:

What is your opinion of kids who are full of excuses?

Are you full of excuses?

Explain.

Q: I guess I just don't really know what love is. I say I love my parents, but I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because they buy things for me and take care of me. I think I love my dog, but really, I just like to play with him and teach him tricks. I'm supposed to love my big brother, but we fight all the time, so I'm not sure. My parents tell me that I must love God, but I don't feel anything for God. I can't see Him or hear Him, so how can I love Him? I need to learn more about what love is.

What God Says: 1 John 4:9–10 *God showed how much He loved us by sending His only Son into the world so we may have eternal love through Him. This is real love.**

A: Real love comes from giving your heart to someone and not expecting anything in return. True love is your parents doing everything for you, caring for you, and keeping you safe without asking for anything in return. Love means to give help without expecting anything for yourself in return. But the most perfect example of love is God, who gave us His only son so we can have eternal life. There is absolutely no better definition of love than that. Pray to God to display His love clearly to you so you can do the same to others.

Questions to ponder:

- Why is showing love so important in a Christian's life?
- What do you love the most?

