

“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 1: JANUARY–MARCH

DON MEINBERG

LUCIDBOOKS

Reaching New Heights

God's Answers to Young Teens' Questions

Volume 1: January–March

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
January 1	Losing a friend	4
January 2	Attitude	6
January 3	Self-control	8
January 4	Dealing with impatient kids	10
January 5	Bad influences	12
January 6	Dealing with disrespectful kids	14
January 7	Peer pressure	16
January 8	Helping a sinner grow	18
January 9	Modesty	20
January 10	Dealing with vain kids	22
January 11	God's will	24
January 12	Dealing with selfish kids	26
January 13	Heaven	28
January 14	Helping a scared friend	30
January 15	Suffering	32
January 16	Dealing with unreliable friends	34
January 17	Anger	36
January 18	Never satisfied	38
January 19	Blaming	40
January 20	Hell	42
January 21	Embarrassment	44
January 22	Dealing with prejudiced people	46
January 23	Stealing	48

January 24	Dealing with kids who worry	50
January 25	Shyness	52
January 26	Dealing with ignorant kids	54
January 27	Belonging	56
January 28	Dealing with kids who hate	58
January 29	Temptation	60
January 30	Anxiety	62
January 31	Teacher problems	64
January Journal		66

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 that very few books 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 its 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 dilemmas. 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 them 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.

Q: I have a best friend whom I've known for many years. We have been best friends, almost inseparable. But last month, she started to change. She started to hang out with other kids and dress way different than before. Then my "best friend" did the ultimate worst thing to me. We had shared many secrets about things such as our dreams, our future boyfriend types, and other girl stuff. She started telling these secrets to those other kids, laughing with them at me about what a baby I am. I was so angry, I cried for a week. I thought I could trust her with my intimate thoughts, but she is a backstabber. I don't know if I'll ever be able to trust a friend again.

What God Says: Psalm 55:22 *"Give your burdens to the LORD, and He will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall."*

A: It must have been devastating for you to have your best friend turn on you like that. What in the world was she thinking? You may think today that you'll never be able to trust your friend again, but there are ways to change that thought. One thing we must always remember is that God is our constant friend, and He promises that He will never leave us or fail us. Talk to God, and ask Him to give you strength and wisdom to find other friends who won't betray you. Sometimes, the lessons of life are extremely difficult, but it's nice to know that you have a father in heaven who will always be there in your time of need.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever had a friend stab you in the back?

If so, how did you handle it?

If not, how would you handle it?

Q: I hate doing chores at home. To me, it's like I have better things to do than work around the house. It seems like none of my other friends have to do as many chores as I do. So when my dad gives me a list of chores to do, like clean my room or take out the trash or wash the car, I can't help but get a really bad attitude by rolling my eyes or saying something mean under my breath. My dad knows I'd rather be skating with my friends or riding my bike, but he constantly gives me these dumb chores. And it seems like the more attitude I give him, the more chores he makes me do. So I look like I enjoy doing these silly tasks, but in reality, I have a terrible attitude against him.

What God Says: Ephesians 6:6-7 *Work hard but not just to please your master when they are watching. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.**

A: I don't think there are many kids anywhere who love to do chores. I'm sure there are many parents who don't like to work around the house, either. I'm sure your mom doesn't jump up and down with joy to wash your dirty socks and underwear. We need to work with enthusiasm at anything we do for whoever needs help. We need to keep in mind that we are serving God as well as people and that He will bless us if we perform our duties with a cheerful attitude. All things in life are good or bad based on what attitude we take. Do as God instructs, and be a happier person.

Questions to ponder:

What type of thing gives you attitude?

How do you manage it?

Q: I have a problem with my big mouth at home. Whenever I get in an argument with my mom or even my brother, I start getting real sassy and mouthy, and I can't seem to control it. Then, my mouth usually gets me in more trouble. I have really put an effort into controlling my temper, but when things don't go the way I want, I just can't control myself. Now, I'm starting to lose control of my mouth at school and with my friends. I really need to get my anger and my big mouth under control, but I don't know how. It seems like everyone hates me, and it's all my fault.

What God Says: Proverbs 13:3 *Those who control the tongue will have a long life; a quick retort can ruin everything.**

A: There is a great way to learn the basics of self-control: Never say the first thing that pops into your head. The normal response when we are angry is to say something insulting or mean or something we will probably regret. Pausing a few seconds and thinking prior to speaking will allow you to calm down a bit and breathe more relaxed. That will help you think with a clear, relaxed mind. God teaches us that a quick response (without thinking) will ruin everything. Another thing that helps is talking to God before reacting. It definitely helps reduce the adrenaline and keep you in control.

Questions to ponder:

What gets out of control in your life?

How do you put it back in control?

JANUARY 4

DEALING WITH IMPATIENT KIDS

Q: My friend has a puppy that she loves dearly. She's had this puppy for about a year, and she totally takes care of it. This dog stays in the house most of the time, but the other day, the puppy saw a cat outside and darted out the open door. My friend thought the puppy would return right away, but she didn't. Since that time, she has been praying to God to bring her puppy back to her, but so far, the dog has not returned. She told me yesterday that she has no more patience with God and that her puppy is lost forever. I told her not to quit praying and that God was listening. She told me she has given up on God and that waiting for Him is a waste of time.

What God Says: Romans 8:25 “*But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.*”

A: It sure seems that your friend's faith in God is low if she gives up and has no patience for Him that quickly. Patience is produced by having total faith in God and allowing Him to do the work in your life. God hears all prayers and listens to our needs. We need to tell impatient kids that God loves them and will answer their prayers in His perfect timing. That may mean your friend's puppy is lost forever, but something better may come along later—maybe something your friend doesn't expect. Always have patience and faith in your father in heaven.

Question to ponder:

What has happened in your life that made you lose patience with God? Explain.

Q: In my neighborhood, there is a group of kids who hang out together. About two weeks ago, I started hanging out with them. It seemed like all these kids ever did was either insult every kid who passed by, throw mud at cars, or start fights with kids from another block. They thought all that was funny. I didn't participate in any of these activities at first, but after a while, I noticed that my behavior was starting to change. Before, I was never a mean or insensitive kid. But lately, I've started to join in the verbal abuse and the mud throwing and even dressing like them. I'm now considered one of them, but I'm not sure that's what I want to be.

What God Says: 1 Thessalonians 1:7 *As a result, you yourselves became an example to all the Christians in Greece.**

A: It's like the old saying: "A bad tree will yield bad fruit." If something looks like a frog, jumps like a frog, and acts like a frog, then it's probably a frog. It is the same with that group of neighborhood kids. If the group talks like troublemakers, acts like troublemakers, and dresses like troublemakers, they probably are troublemakers. God wants us to be model kids in our neighborhoods, standing for everything good and right. If the kids you hang out with are not model kids, then God says to run the other way as fast as you can and not associate with evil. We have the perfect example to live by in the person of Jesus Christ.

Question to ponder:

How do you handle a bad influence in your life?

Give a specific example.

JANUARY 6

DEALING WITH DISRESPECTFUL KIDS

Q: There is a kid in my class who is totally disrespectful to the teachers and the aides. When the teacher is trying to teach the class, he is always disruptive, talking to others, passing notes, or laughing out loud. When the teachers ask him to be quiet, he is extremely sassy, saying mean things, or he just ignores them. He has been disciplined many times, but it doesn't seem to change him. Even when some of the parents come to help in the classroom, he's very mean and disrespectful to them. He's arrogant and loud, and we're really getting tired of it.

What God Says: *I Peter 5:5 You younger men, accept the authority of the elders. And all of you serve each other in humility. God sets Himself against the proud, but He shows favor to the humble.**

A: When a kid acts loud and obnoxious, it is very difficult to try to teach him about humility. Being totally disrespectful to teachers, aides, and parents shows the pride this kid has in himself, setting himself up as a tough guy. God does not care about tough guys; as a matter of fact, He dishonors them. That is because God is about love, honor, and respect for others. The best way to handle this kid is to ignore his antics and continue to respect your elders with humility as God teaches. If this kid realizes he's not getting the attention he wants, he may stop his arrogant and disrespectful ways.

Questions to ponder:

- Are you sometimes disrespectful to your elders?
- What causes you to be disrespectful?
- How can you change your disrespectful attitude?

JANUARY 7

PEER PRESSURE

Q: I have a core of about four friends I mostly hang out with every day at school. We all have the same classes together, and we usually sit by each other. Now, I've always been a good student. I usually get straight As, but my friends have always struggled in school, and they usually get Cs or Ds on their tests. The other day, we had a midterm exam in history, and they told me that the only way they would pass was if I let them see my answers. Because they were my friends, I did it. Tomorrow, we have an important English test, and they are putting a lot of pressure on me to do it again. I don't like people to cheat, and I surely don't want to get caught, but I also don't want to lose my friends.

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 15:33 *“Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for 'bad company corrupts good character.'”*

A: God tells us that our character and our integrity are extremely important, and we should not allow anyone to destroy them. If kids are leading you to evil, then they are not your true friends. If you allow them to cheat on this English test, then when will it ever end? The next test after that, they will want the same thing. It needs to stop now. Instead, you should offer to tutor them or study with them, so they can learn the material. If these kids will not be your friends or put a lot of pressure on you because you won't help them to cheat, then they were never your friends to begin with. They are only using you. You need to get different friends who share your godly values.

Question to ponder:

How do you handle peer pressure in your life?

Give specific examples.

JANUARY 8

HELPING A SINNER GROW

Q: I have a friend at school who is a really nice person with a good heart. The problem is that she struggles mightily with sin. Now, I know we all sin, but she is either lying to her parents, cheating at school, stealing petty things at a store, or being mean to kids in her neighborhood all the time. She says she does most of these sinful acts for the right reasons. She lied to her parents to help a friend not get busted for drugs. She cheated at school by giving her friend answers on a test because her friend didn't have a chance to study. She stole candy at a store to give it to a boy who was hungry, and she was mean to other kids who were being mean to her sister. Her heart is in the right place, but her behavior is wrong. She knows what she is doing is wrong, but she doesn't know how to change.

What God Says: Colossians 2:14 *He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.**

A: So, your friend has good intentions but bad execution. Her heart might be in the right place, but her behavior needs a little tweaking. To change sinful behavior, the person needs to turn to God and ask Him for forgiveness from the heart. Then, the person needs to pray for wisdom to continue to do the right thing but in the right way. God welcomes all sinners who actively seek Him with a sincere heart. Christ's death on the cross gave sinners like us a chance for new life if we ask for it.

Questions to ponder:

- Do you have a friend who constantly sins?
- How do you help them change their ways?

Q: I am a 12-year-old girl, and I want to dress any way I like. I enjoy wearing really tight jeans or spaghetti strap tops to school or the mall and watching all the guys just drool over me. It is fun when I wear a short dress or miniskirt and watch the boys try to get close to me. My parents give me a real tough time, telling me that I dress way too sexy or provocative and that I could get hurt in the long run. I love all the attention I get from boys, especially when they go out of their way to flirt with me. Since it is my body and I'm not hurting anyone, I don't understand why I can't dress the way I want without getting hassled by my parents.

What God Says: 1 Timothy 2:9 *“I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves.”*

A: The type of attention you describe is not good for the soul. In today's world, it is extremely dangerous to dress in revealing, sexy clothes because the consequences far exceed any advantage of extra attention. God is very straightforward that inward beauty that attracts attention is much more important than outward appearance from wearing inappropriate clothing. The type of attention you're getting is the kind you really don't want. Guys may take advantage of you, or you could get a reputation for being “easy.” Be modest in your appearance, and allow your inward beauty to shine.

Questions to ponder:

Do you agree that girls and guys should be modest in what they wear? Why or why not?

JANUARY 10

DEALING WITH VAIN KIDS

Q: Have you ever had a friend who could not go five minutes without looking at himself or herself in the mirror? That perfectly describes one of my friends at school. Her best friend is her mirror, and she goes nowhere without it. She is only 14 years old, and yet she is always checking her makeup and her hair to make sure she looks perfect. She's a good friend, but this obsession with her outer appearance is really getting on my nerves. You should see her bedroom. She has a mirror on every wall, so no matter where she looks, she can see herself. I wish she would concentrate her attention more on our friendship and less on herself.

What God Says: Proverbs 31:30 *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised.”*

A: You need to tell your friend that outward beauty reveals only what we look like, but inner beauty reveals who we are. Loving others and helping those in need should be your best friends, not the mirror. God could care less what you look like on the outside; it's what you have on the inside that counts. Your friendship and your friend's relationship with God are so much more important than her outer appearance. You need to tell her that she must build on something that will last throughout eternity, not on something that will eventually fade away.

Questions to ponder:

What do you think of kids who are vain and snooty?

Do you know someone like that? Explain.

Q: I'm a baseball fanatic. I love to play baseball and watch baseball on television. There isn't much about baseball that I don't know, including the rules, the players on every team, and even the main statistics of the best players. The problem is that I'm not very good at playing baseball. I can catch the ball, but I can't hit very well. On the other hand, I play the tuba very well, good enough to beat out six other kids for the middle school band. But I can't stand lugging around this large, heavy instrument everywhere I go, and I certainly don't enjoy it as much as baseball, but I know I can't do both. I want to know which one God would want me to do.

What God Says: Psalm 32:8 *"The LORD says, I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."*

A: We need to trust God and ask Him what He wants us to do in our lives. He will answer us either through His word, through people, or through circumstances (not making the baseball team). He alone knows the best path for our lives, so if we pray to Him, He will guide us in the right direction. Once you decide to allow God to guide you down the right path, you need to trust Him completely, even if the path is not necessarily the one you wanted. Take God's advice, and you know you'll always be going down the right road.

Questions to ponder:

What do you think is God's will in your life?

How do you know?

JANUARY 12

DEALING WITH SELFISH KIDS

Q: There is a kid in my class who is always bragging about all the things she has and all the money her family has. She is probably wealthier than most kids and has all the cool technological gadgets at her house. The problem is that she wouldn't share even a pencil with anyone in the class. She is extremely selfish, and we all know that she has enough "stuff" to give to other less fortunate kids, but she refuses to share. Except for that, she's a pretty nice kid, but it really bugs me how someone could be so selfish. Is there a way I could possibly get her to share?

What God Says: *Philippians 2:3 Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.**

A: It is extremely difficult to teach someone humility or a sharing heart. All you can do is teach by example. You need to continue to think of the well-being of others more than yourself and be tenderhearted toward others in your class. Maybe, when she sees how blessed you are by your actions, she'll start to mend her ways and not be as selfish. Read the verse above again and notice that God teaches us to be humble in everything we do, thinking of others ahead of ourselves.

Questions to ponder:

Do you know selfish kids?

How do you deal with them?

Q: My parents are always talking to me about heaven. They tell me it's like living in the most perfect place with angels all around and God sitting on His throne with trumpets blasting. But how do I know that heaven actually exists? Like I said, the Bible says it exists, my mom and dad say it exists, and my Sunday school teacher says it exists, but how do I know for sure? Unfortunately, I am the type of person who needs to see something or feel it before I believe it. When I die, I know I go in a box in the ground forever, so how do I go from the ground to heaven? It's really confusing!

What God Says: 2 Corinthians 5:1 *For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down when we die and leave these bodies, we will have a home in heaven.**

A: The way we know how to get to heaven is that God tells us in the Bible. If you read the verse above, it clearly states that when we die, we will leave these earthly bodies and be in heaven. So, you know heaven exists because God says so. You say you need to see or feel something before you believe. That's not the way it works with God. He wants us to have faith in Him, in Jesus Christ, and in heaven without seeing so that He knows our hearts. When you die, your body goes in the ground, but your soul goes straight to heaven if you lived your life for Jesus. Your body is only temporary, but your soul is eternal.

Questions to ponder:

Do you believe heaven exists?

How do you know?

JANUARY 14

HELPING A SCARED FRIEND

Q: My friend has not seen her dad since she was a baby. He left town when she was three months old, and now she's 13. She has been trying for the last couple of years to find him so she can see what he's like. Somehow, her teacher used the Internet to locate him, and they made arrangements to have him come to my friend's house tomorrow night. Right now, she is scared to death. She is worried that he might not like her or that she's not what he expected or that he will leave her again. Her mom will be with her, but she still has quite a few emotions and is scared that the reunion will not go well. What is the best way to comfort her?

What God Says: Deuteronomy 20:3 *He will say, "Listen to me all you men of Israel. Do not be afraid. Do not lose heart or panic."**

A: No matter what the situation—facing impossible odds of achieving something or being involved in an uncomfortable situation like seeing a long-lost dad—God is always able to bring peace and strength to all who ask Him for it. Tell your friend to pray to God and tell Him her fears and anxieties, and let His mighty hand comfort her. He does not want us to be afraid or lose heart or panic when facing our fears. He wants to guide us with peace and love. God will make all things right for those who trust in Him.

Question to ponder:

How do you help a scared friend?

Explain in detail.

Q: I am a believer in Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior, and all my faith is in Him. But I get teased and ridiculed by my non-Christian classmates for it. I get called names like “goody-two-shoes,” “Jesus freak,” and other names that make me feel really bad. It seems like the only times I don’t get teased is when I’m in church. Because of this, I suffer every day by being lonely and hurt. Sometimes, it gets to the point that I want to tell these kids that I quit going to church so the suffering will stop. If God loves me, then why do I have to suffer so much because I believe in Him? Why can’t God take away the pain and suffering I feel?

What God Says: Romans 8:17–18 *Since we are His children, we will share in His treasures—for everything God gives to His son is ours, too. But if we are to share in His glory, we are also to share in is suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will give us later.**

A: We need to keep in mind that any suffering we experience for our faith is pleasing to God. To share in God’s glory means to share in God’s suffering. But the reward in heaven makes it all worthwhile. Also, remember that Jesus suffered during His time here on earth. He endured ridicule, mocking, and physical abuse just to save us from our sins. Jesus suffered torture and death on the cross for us. So if you are suffering for God’s sake, you are in great company. Talk to God and ask Him for strength in your faith, and your rewards in heaven will be great.

Questions to ponder:

- Have you ever suffered for your love of God?
- If yes, how did you handle it?
- If no, how would you handle it?

JANUARY 16

DEALING WITH UNRELIABLE FRIENDS

Q: I have a good friend who is extremely unreliable. Any time she says she'll do something for me or promises to deliver a message for me, she forgets to do it. For example, the other day I couldn't make it to band practice because I had a doctor's appointment for my allergies. I asked her to tell my band teacher that I had an excused absence. Well, my friend completely forgot to tell my teacher, and I got marked down for an unexcused absence. When I help her with her homework, I can't rely on her to give my notes back to me. When I let her borrow things, she loses them. I love her a lot as a friend, but I don't know how I can start trusting her with anything.

What God Says: 1 John 4:16 *We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in Him.**

A: It's very difficult when a good friend is unreliable. Putting your faith in someone is a big step for most of us, and when that faith is broken time and time again, it becomes very disheartening. You need to talk to your friend about God and her problem and then have her ask Him for help in becoming more reliable. That way, you can start trusting her again, but only with small, insignificant things. When she proves to be reliable with the small things, give her more substantial things as she grows in Christ. But remember to start with prayer first, and always put your trust in God.

Questions to ponder:

Do you have unreliable friends?

How do you help them become more reliable?

Q: It seem like I'm always angry at my stepmom. She really does try hard not to act like she's my real mom, but whenever she disciplines me or asks me to do anything, I get very angry and say things I shouldn't say. I guess I was very bitter when my mom and dad separated. I loved being a family, and when all of a sudden they decided to divorce, it made me extremely angry inside. I think I take some of that anger out on my new stepmom. I actually do like her, but she's not my real mom, and I just can't get over that. Still, I need to give her more of a chance and not lash out at her in anger. What do you suggest so I can control my tongue?

What God Says: James 3:5 *The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do.**

A: Your stepmom is a human being and a child of God and should be treated with love and respect, just like you would treat any other person. It is not fair for you to treat your stepmom so rudely because of a situation that has little to do with her. Read James 3:5 again. Your tongue can cause tremendous damage when used without thinking. Try to avoid speaking your mind when you are angry. You will, more times than not, say something you will regret later. Instead of getting angry and saying something mean, say a quick prayer to God to give you wisdom before you speak.

Questions to ponder:

Is there someone in your life that makes you angry a lot?
How do you handle your anger?

JANUARY 18

NEVER SATISFIED

Q: I'm 13 years old, a straight A student, captain of my tennis team, and very popular at school. I'm pretty good at most things, and my life seems to be going well. The problem is that I'm extremely hard on myself, and I am never satisfied with my accomplishments. I get real angry at myself when I get a B on a test or if I lose a tennis match. I'm always striving to be better at everything, and when I do better, I'm reaching for the next goal instead of being satisfied with accomplishing the last goal. People around me are always saying how smart and talented I am, but I have a hard time believing it.

What God Says: Psalm 63:5 *You satisfy me more than the richest of foods.
I will praise you with songs of joy.**

A: We must remember that our beauty, our intelligence, our talents, and all our accomplishments are gifts from God. He is the one who gives us all these things so we can use them in honor of Him. Believing in God and living by His word should satisfy you to the fullest as the verse above says. Satisfaction comes from within, and when we realize who the true owner of these gifts is, we are better able to cope with our achievements.

Questions to ponder:

Do you know people who are never satisfied?
What's your opinion of these people?

Q: It seems like I'm always getting blamed for things my younger brother does. If we are playing outside and we both do something we know is wrong, I will get the blame, and my younger brother doesn't get into any trouble at all. My parents say that because I am older, I should know better. But my brother is only two years younger than I am, so why is everything always my fault? Here's an example: We were playing baseball in our front yard. I threw a pitch, and my brother hit the ball through a window. When we told our parents what happened, I got in trouble for playing too close to the house, and yet he was the one who hit the ball through the window. So now when I'm with my younger brother, he knows he won't be blamed when something goes wrong, and I will.

What God Says: 1 Thessalonians 3:13 *Christ will make your heart strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to Him.**

A: Your mom and dad may not have all the facts when you and your brother do something wrong, but God does. It may be frustrating for you as the older brother to be blamed for everything, but the good thing is that if we live our lives for Jesus and believe in Him, our sins (or wrongs) are forgiven, and we will be blameless in the eyes of the Lord almighty. So I wouldn't worry too much about being blamed for your brother's mistakes. Just put your faith in Christ, ask Him for help, and you'll be fine.

Question to ponder:

What do you do when you are wrongfully blamed?

Give specific examples.

Q: I have a lot of questions about hell. There are things about it that just don't make a lot of sense to me. First of all, does hell really exist? Since God is all about love, then how could He send good people to hell? All I read about in the Bible and hear from my parents and Sunday school teachers is that God is loving, kind, merciful, and full of grace. How can a God who is that wonderful send people to hell? I know I want to spend eternity with God in heaven, but I have a hard time believing that good people go to hell. How do I make sure I don't go to hell?

What God Says: Matthew 13:49–50 *That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the godly, throwing the wicked in the fire.**

A: First of all, yes, hell really does exist. We know that because God tells us so in the Bible. Read the passage above. When God says He will throw the wicked in the fire, those are the people going to hell. Remember, God gives us all a choice to either follow Him or not, and the choice we make determines where we will spend eternity. God does not send people to hell. People send themselves to hell by not believing in His word. You can make sure you don't go to hell by believing in Christ as your savior and living your life for God.

Questions to ponder:

Do you believe hell exists?

How do you know for sure?

JANUARY 21

EMBARRASSMENT

Q: Most of the kids I hang out with either at school or around the neighborhood are non-Christians. I go to church every Sunday and youth group every Tuesday night. My friends are always asking me to join them on Sunday mornings at the mall, on Saturday night for a sleepover, or on Tuesday after school for an activity. I sometimes get embarrassed by always saying no because I have to go to church. I sometimes get so embarrassed that I lie and tell them I have other plans. Now don't get me wrong, I love going to church and want to continue, but I love my friends and don't want to feel embarrassed anymore.

What God Says: 2 Timothy 1:8 *You must never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord.**

A: If your friends were good, true friends, they would definitely understand your dedication to church and youth activities. If they don't understand and make you feel embarrassed, then they were never true friends to begin with. Why can't you plan activities with them on the other days of the week or after church on Sunday? If you get out by noon, you still have the rest of the day to be with your friends. As the verse says, never be ashamed of God or His church. Don't ever compromise your faith, and always put God first in your life. Your reward in heaven will be great!

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever been embarrassed about your love for God?

If yes, how did you handle it?

If no, how would you handle it?

JANUARY 22

DEALING WITH PREJUDICED PEOPLE

Q: I am a very good swimmer. I have been swimming since I was four years old. I tried out for the city team, but the coach would not allow me on it because I'm a Latino girl. It is a boy's swim team, but since there aren't any girls' teams in the city, it is the only opportunity I have to participate. They have had girls on the team, but they were all white. I know it's tougher for me because I'm a girl, but I'm pretty sure the coach is prejudiced against the Latin American culture. He never said it, but I can tell by his attitude and the way he treated me. What makes it worse is that my swim times are as good or better than the boys. How can I deal with such prejudice?

What God Says: *2 Chronicles 19:7 Fear the LORD and judge with care, for the LORD our God does not tolerate perverted justice, partiality, or the taking of bribes.**

A: God hates the sin of prejudice because He created us all the same in His image and likeness, and we are His children no matter if we are Caucasian, African American, Asian, Latino, Indian, or anything else. In God's eyes, no race or ethnic background is better than another. There is no superior gender. God would want you to stand up for your rights. You need to ask this coach why you are not allowed on the team since your times are as good as the boys' times. If he doesn't give you a good answer, go to his authority. Only God is our judge, and He shows no partiality to anyone.

Question to ponder:

What do you think of people who are prejudiced toward others because of their ethnic background?

Give an example of someone like that.

Q: I'm a really big kid for my age. I'm only in the sixth grade, but I stand about 5 feet 7 inches tall and weigh over 170 pounds. I am by far the biggest kid in my class. So I take advantage of my size, and just for fun, I love taking other kids' lunch money or eating their lunches. I do it all the time, mostly to the smaller fourth- and fifth-grade kids, the ones I know can't do anything about it. These kids don't tell their teachers or their parents because they are afraid I'll pound their faces. It may not sound like it, but I'm not a bad kid. I know what I'm doing is wrong, but to me, it's a lot of fun, and I get a kick out of taking things that don't belong to me.

What God Says: Ephesians 4:28 *If you are a thief, stop stealing.**

A: I'm not sure whether you are a bad kid or not. The worst kind of stealing is taking things from innocent victims who don't have a chance. If you know what you are doing is wrong, then stop doing it. God boldly states that if you are stealing from others, then stop. How much fun do you think it would be if someone over 6 feet tall weighing over 250 pounds were doing the same thing to you? The harm you do to another person is the same type of harm that will come to you. You need to turn from this sin immediately and ask God for forgiveness.

Question to ponder:

How can you help kids stop stealing?

JANUARY 24

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO WORRY

Q: My friend is trying out for the seventh-grade basketball team. He's a pretty good player but not as good as most of the other players trying out for the team. Most of the other kids are taller than he is and can jump higher. He has a nice shot, but he's not very quick, so his shots can be easily blocked. He really wants to make the team, and for the last couple of weeks, he's been losing sleep at night worrying about it. The more I tell him not to worry, the more he worries and—worse than that—the worse he plays. I'm not sure why it's so important for him to make this team, but it is. But his worrying is starting to affect his schoolwork and home life.

What God Says: Philippians 4:6 *“Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything.”*

A: The only way to get rid of worry is to trust God and put everything in His hands. He teaches us in the above verse to stop worrying and start praying. God wants to ease our burden and take away the worries of life. Remember, we need to accept the things we cannot change. All we can do is give 100% effort and pray for the best. Whatever happens after that we can't control, so we need to give it to God. Always remember that worrying is a worthless emotion and will never make a situation better.

Questions to ponder:

Do you have friends who worry about everything?

How do you help them calm their nerves?

Q: I'm in the eighth grade, and I am very shy. I rarely talk to anyone at school. Most of the time, I keep to myself. I'm not sure why I'm like that. I am an only child, and my parents give me a lot of attention, but when I leave the house, I get scared and shy. I wish I had a friend to talk to at school, but I am afraid to approach anyone. No one ever comes up to me because they think I'm too quiet and they'll have nothing to say. There are times when I enjoy being alone and reading my books, but sometimes I get sad watching other kids laughing, playing together, and having fun, but I'm too shy to join in. What can I do to get over this shyness?

What God Says: Matthew 28:20 *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

A: Keep in mind that with God in your heart, you are never really alone. We can all take comfort in knowing that God is always with us and will always be there for us. But what you are doing is robbing yourself of a special gift God has provided for all of us, and that's the gift of fellowship. God put people in our lives to help and comfort us in times of sorrow and to celebrate with us in times of joy. You need to pray to God for the strength and courage to approach other kids and get them to know you so you can start building relationships. It may be uncomfortable for you at first, but at least you know you won't be doing it alone.

Questions to ponder:

How do you think kids get over their shyness?

Give an example of a shy kid you know and what you can do to help them.

JANUARY 26

DEALING WITH IGNORANT KIDS

Q: My friend and I have a science teacher who I'll call Mrs. X. Now, Mrs. X must be over 70 years old, and she talks in a low monotone voice. She runs a very tough class and is always disciplining the kids who are misbehaving. She is a very good teacher. If I ever have a problem with my science homework, she always makes time to explain it to me again and again until I get it. The problem is that my friend refuses to listen to her or learn from her because she is old and strict. She has become extremely ignorant about her attitude toward Mrs. X, and when I try to talk to her about it, she totally ignores me. She doesn't try at all to learn the material and only complains about the teacher. How can I help her get over her ignorance?

What God Says: Proverbs 2:3-5 *Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD.**

A: We all must learn to fear the Lord. It is not like feeling scared and terrified but a fear that shows God reverence and respect. God put Mrs. X in that classroom for a reason. He wants you to learn from and listen to her knowledge and experience. All your friend is doing is showing her true ignorance toward another human being. To help cure her ignorance, have your friend pretend that it is our Lord teaching that science class in Mrs. X's body. Changing one's perspective should change one's attitude and hopefully eliminate the ignorance.

Question to ponder:

How do you deal with ignorant kids?

Give a specific example.

Q: I am in the sixth grade, and I badly want to belong to a popular group in my class. It's a group of about five kids that everyone in the sixth grade looks up to and admires. Most of those kids are kind of rough. They talk mean to other kids, they sass teachers, they don't care about their grades, and they walk around like tough guys who scare most kids. I want to belong to that group because all the kids respect them, and they are so cool. They told me I had to go through some sort of initiation process to be a part of the group. I'm really not sure what that is, but it doesn't really matter, because I will do just about anything to belong.

What God Says: Galatians 5:24 *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there.”*

A: Why in the world would you want to belong to a group like that? It sounds like a group led by the devil to entice young kids like you to join its forces. There is nothing cool about hurting others. Being part of God's group may not be the most popular thing to do, but undoubtedly it is the most rewarding. And here is the beauty of it—there is no initiation process. Just accept Jesus as your personal Lord and savior, live your life for Him, and YOU'RE IN! What may seem like the cool group at the beginning may result in a cold, miserable ending.

Questions to ponder:

Is there a group or club that you really want to belong to?

If so, why?

If not, why do you think kids need to belong?

JANUARY 28

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO HATE

Q: A kid in my class hates a friend of mine because he's different. When I say different, I don't mean race, religion, or sexual preference. My friend is nice and smart, and most kids at my school like him. He treats everyone kindly and has a big heart. The other kid thinks my friend is a jerk and a nerd because he is nice to girls. We are at an age that boys still don't like girls that much, but my friend gave a girl a Valentine's Day card. This other jerk was so enraged and full of hate that he went and punched my friend hard in the arm for no reason. He's always telling my friend he hates him, and he insults my friend with many names. How can anyone deal with someone who hates for no reason?

What God Says: John 13:34–35 *I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. As I have loved you, you should love one another. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.**

A: God is all about love, and He loves each and every one of us very much. God doesn't know hate for His people, and He wants to change those hearts that do hate. The only way to teach a kid like this is to continue to show love and kindness. You see, when you continue to love, you draw more people to yourself and have more friends. Your friend seems like a kid who has love in his heart. This other kid needs to get the hint that his hate is not having any effect and that love will conquer hate every time. Remember, many hated Jesus, but all He showed was love.

Questions to ponder:

Why do kids hate?

How can that hate be changed to love?

Q: My friends and I are all 11 years old. However, one of my friends is pretty big and could easily pass for a 15- or 16-year-old. All four of us wanted to see the new *Star Trek* movie, but it was rated PG-13. We all decided we were going to see the movie and tell our parents we went to the mall. My parents as well as my buddy's parents hate science fiction movies, so we knew they would never take us. My mom would be upset if she knew I went to a PG-13 movie without an adult or without prior permission. After the movie, I was extremely tempted to lie to my parents like the other kids and say I went to the mall. I definitely did not want to hear a lecture or, worse, get grounded.

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 10:13 *Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up to it. When you are tempted, He will show you the way so that you will not give in to it.**

A: The easiest way to start moving away from God is to start giving in to temptation. The devil is always in a position to tempt us. He wants us to yield to temptation so we will not follow the Lord. That's why he tempts us in so many things. You need to do the right thing and tell your parents the truth. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 again. Also, remember that the chances are high that your parents will find out the truth anyway, and then you will be in double trouble for lying.

Questions to ponder:

Tell me about your biggest temptation to do evil.
How did you handle it?

Q: I absolutely hate going to the dentist. I would rather go anywhere or do anything else than see the dentist. Any time I need to go, I start shaking, and my stomach goes in knots. I get that nauseating feeling like I'm going to throw up. I don't know what it is, but there's something about the dentist that gives me anxiety, and nothing seems to help calm me down. My mom has tried everything, including buying me a new baseball bat or getting candy after the appointment, but it doesn't help. When I see the dentist's office, I go nuts. I need to figure out how to get rid of this terrible anxiety.

What God Says: Luke 21:34 *Watch out! Don't let me find you filled with the worries of life.**

A: Most people get high anxiety going to the dentist or doctor. There's something about the dentist, either the smell or the noise of the drill, that causes us fear. But, in the passage above, God says to cast all anxieties and fears in this world onto Him, and He will give you peace. God is your only salvation from high anxiety. Talk to Him in prayer before going to the dentist's office, and ask Him for courage and strength. Tell Him your anxieties, and then trust Him to help you. If you do this, your anxieties will definitely be minimized.

Questions to ponder:

Why does going to a dentist give most people anxiety?

How would you try to calm your anxieties?

TEACHER PROBLEMS

Q: I have a seventh-grade teacher who hates me. She is always on my case. When all the kids are being loud and talking, she always seems to single me out, and I'm the one who gets in the most trouble. When she's asking questions to the entire class and no one knows the answer, she always seems to pick on me. If anything goes wrong in the classroom, I usually get blamed for it. For instance, last week there was a bunch of kids throwing wads of paper across the room, and instead of all of us getting in trouble, I got blamed for starting it, even though I didn't. Then, when I don't do well on a test, it seems like she enjoys giving me a bad grade. I truly don't know what to do.

What God Says: Romans 13:4 *The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that purpose to punish those who do wrong.**

A: Authorities are put in place for a reason, and that is to keep the laws sacred and to discipline those who don't obey the laws. They are there to help us in any way they can and make sure things are done right. However, if authority figures overstep their bounds, they will be subject to God's judgment. You need to read Romans 13:4 again so you can totally understand your teacher's role. Then, go talk to her in private—humbly, respectfully—and explain your frustrations. God has a way of making every impossible situation positive.

Questions to ponder:

Has there ever been a teacher that you didn't like?

Why?

How did you handle that teacher?

