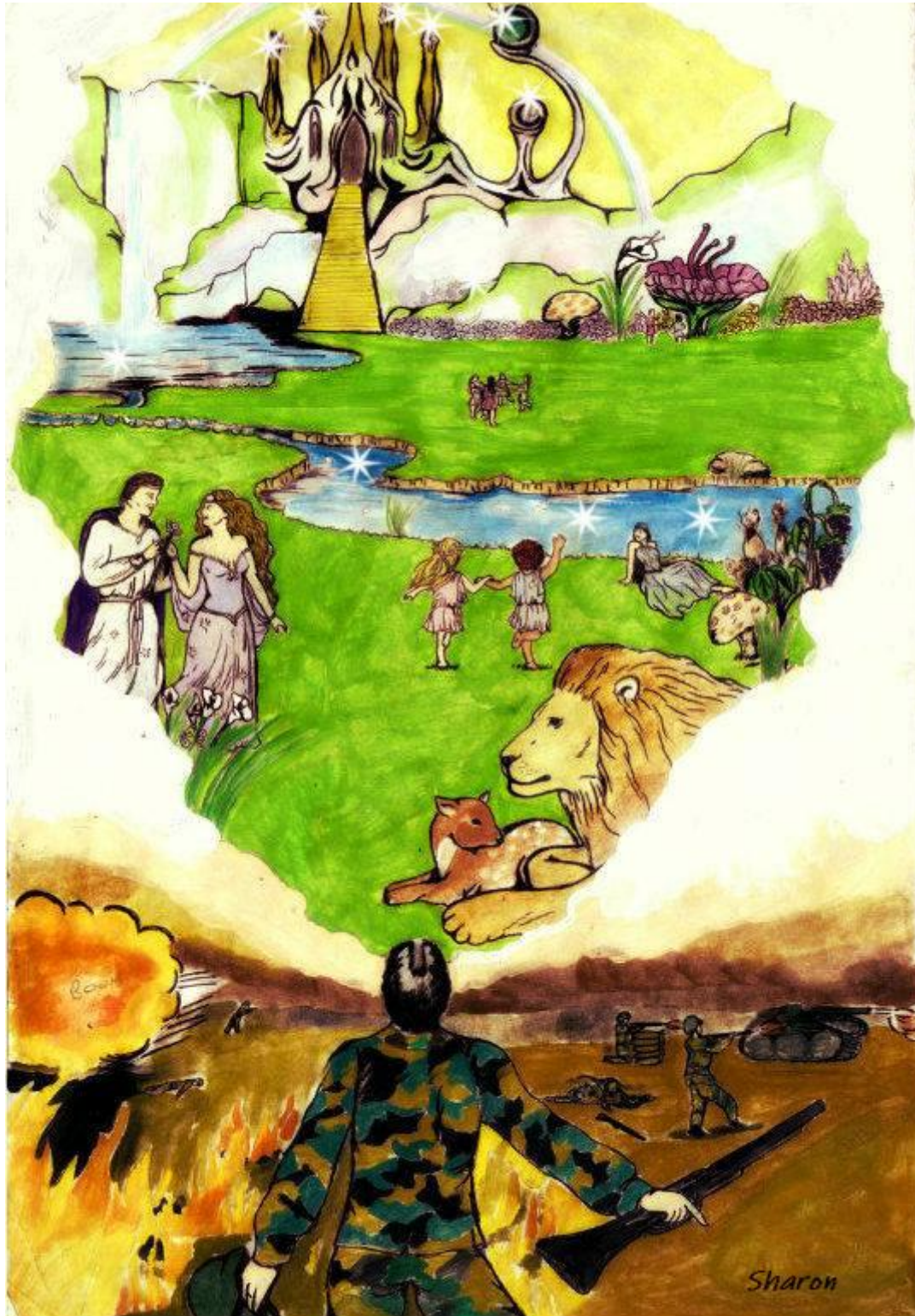


DEVOTIONAL STORIES FOR TEENAGERS!



Over 50 stories that will constrain you to keep on serving our Master!

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DEVOTIONAL STORIES FOR TEENAGERS!

Over 50 stories that will constrain you to keep on serving our Master!

By The Family of David
2004

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Challenge for the Challengers

The Challengers were on a four-game losing streak. Actually, the whole season had been going pretty badly. Last season they had barely managed to keep a .500 record, meaning they had lost almost as many games as they won. Now what sport the Challengers played is not important, nor even what city they played for. If you like football, then they were a football team. If you prefer basketball, ice hockey, baseball, soccer, or cricket, then they could be that too. What matters is that the team was not doing well.

The Head Coach had been getting pressure from the management for some time to turn their season around. "You guys have got to start winning," he would hear over the phone, "either that or you're all fired and I'm going to hire a team that actually wants to play and that can win some games." The coach took this seriously and he got the team together and made some changes.

"Anyone who doesn't want to play, doesn't have to play. You can leave now."

A few players exited.

"Anyone who wants to continue to play must work as a team. We can't have these in-team struggles and disagreements. Whatever your problem is with each other, you make up, and fast. We've gotta be friends out there, or we're not going to make it."

The players began to apologize to one another and work out their differences. They wanted to win.

"Next," continued the coach, "we're going to lay down some new rules."

1. No more bars, no more clubs, no more drinking during training camp, or the playing season.

2. No eating of any food prepared by anyone other than our team chef. No junk food, no extras. Stick to the team menu.

3. Lights out at 10:30PM. No exceptions.

4. Quit reading the papers. All they can say is how badly we play and how we're never going to win anything. That's discouraging and it's bad for our morale.

5. From now on, no more papers or magazines. If you want to read something, read the weekly coaching and strategy bulletins from team management.

This was more than the players were expecting. Sure they wanted to win when it wasn't costing them much, but this? They could see getting rid of the half-hearts, they could see getting over their differences, but all these rules? It seemed a little much, and most of them figured that they were in pretty good shape anyway and could easily do those things and still come up with the effort to win.

Practice that day didn't go well. They all looked like they didn't want to be there any more, and most of them looked like they were playing at half-speed

just to spite their coach for clamping down. The coach had done what he needed to do, but it didn't seem like the players were responding well. This just seemed bad for their morale. Had he made a mistake? Whatever the case, their next game was tomorrow, and the prospects didn't seem encouraging.

Predictably, they lost the game. Pretty badly too. A dejected team gathered in the locker room and waited the arrival of the coach. They knew what he would say. Before he entered though, the Team Captain cleared his throat and began to speak:

"Guys, you all know that we can do better than that. Those guys weren't that tough. Heck, they're not half the players we are. We could have beat them good if we had just put our minds to it. But I know why we didn't. We're upset at Coach, right? We don't like these new team rules. We think we're good enough to win without them, right? That's what we've been telling ourselves for too long now.

"But what if we're not good enough? Everyone knows we've had a pretty rotten season. We're on a five-game losing streak, and I think that it's going to continue if we don't start giving Coach our cooperation and playing like the team we know we are. We can beat anyone, any day, any place; we just have to stop sulking like a bunch of babies. I've done it too, we all have, and I think that it needs to stop.

"If Coach thinks that these new rules are going to help us, then let's give it a shot. We've been playing and living the way we've wanted to for a few seasons now, and what has it got us? How many championships have we won? How many prizes? How many times have we even made the finals? We all know that the answer is none! If we don't get our act together, management is going to sell the team and get some winners together. We've been a disgrace to the Challengers name.

"I don't know about you, but I want to win. If that means I can't drink anymore, if I have to go to bed early, if I have to eat only team food, that's fine with me. All that won't matter much when we win it in the big time. When I hold that trophy and know that we're #1, that no one and nobody is better than us, then I don't think I'll care what I had to eat or drink to get there. We sure as hell haven't been winning our way, so let's play it their way and see where it takes us. Who's with me?"

"Me!" "I am!" "Yeah, let's win this thing!" "We're in!" replied the team.

To a man, the Challengers got serious about their season. They stopped griping about the changes and let it strengthen them instead. They trained hard, they stopped holding a grudge against the coach, and they listened to what he had to say.

It was an unfortunate team that next played the Challengers. They were crushed like bugs under the Challenger steamroller—a steamroller that went undefeated into the playoffs, and won the big championship. It looked like they could never lose. After the winning game, the team gathered in the locker-room

with their coach to celebrate. They partied long and hard into the night. They deserved it. They had won it all. They had sacrificed, they had played hard, and they got their reward.

Later that evening they got a call from management. "Good job, boys!" said the owner. "I'm so proud to see that the Challengers are once again in their rightful spot—at the top!" The Challengers cheered loudly and slapped their coach on the back. "I'm happy to announce that you're all signed again for another season," continued the owner, "that is, if you're willing to come aboard." Once again, to a man the Challengers said, "Yes!" and signed on for what was to be their most successful season in team history.

Key Promise: The power of the keys of change can make winners out of losers, and help you to be the champions that you are destined to be.

A Closer Connection

Stephanie pulled back the top sheet and dropped onto her bed, dead tired from the long day she'd spent mostly taking care of her little YC group. It felt so delicious to be off her feet and to just lie there. Even though the summer night's air was very warm, a little breeze wafted over her through the window next to her bed, and that felt nice. Melanie, her roommate, was visiting another Home, so Stephanie had the room all to herself tonight. Though she was close to Melanie, it was nice for a change to be alone. At first, thoughts of the busy day ran through her brain and then turned to the jobs that had been scheduled for her tomorrow.

Okay, stop thinking all these busyness thoughts, she told herself. *Now's my time to relax, not think about work.* Then the thought came to her that she had grown lax in remembering to pray before going to sleep. Sometimes she felt so tired, she just fell asleep the minute her head hit the pillow. But tonight she felt a special urge to talk to Jesus before falling asleep.

"Jesus, I'm sorry I haven't been faithful to pray a goodnight prayer lately," she began. "I wish I could feel a closer connection with You, and that it would just come more naturally for me to talk with You and learn to love You more."

As Stephanie spoke from her heart to the Lord, she felt His comfort come over her, but at the same time a feeling that she could only describe as a thirst or a hunger—an emptiness inside that was new to her.

"What is this feeling that I'm having now, Jesus?" she inquired. "I've never really felt that way before." She heard the answer to her question echo in her mind.

"That's Me, honey, showing you that you have a thirst and a hunger for the things of My Spirit deep in your soul. Even though you never felt it before,

it's there, and I want to fill that empty place with thrilling secrets that will excite you beyond your wildest dreams!"

Stephanie just knew this was Jesus speaking directly to her, and she was blown away by the thought that she could actually hear these words of His so clearly here in the quiet of her room.

Key promises:

The keys can open the door to revelations that will strengthen your spirit in ways you have longed for all your life.

Claim the power of the keys so that you can hear and receive My Words as the pure, sweet, refreshing, invigorating, alive, shocking, and exciting waters that they are.

A Game Gone Wrong

"I don't see how doing things together is going to help our unity any," Gianna said despondently.

"What do you mean?" asked Luke, Gianna's dad.

Their drives to the market were the times that Dad and Gianna usually ended up talking, as the market was almost an hour away. "Well," she continued, "with this whole renewal thing, we're supposed to like do things together, and all that. It sounds good in theory, but in reality I think I get along better with Mimi when we don't have to play games together."

"I see," Dad thoughtfully responded. "Did something happen during your game time last night?" "Mimi is a brat!" Gianna blurted out.

"What happened?" questioned her dad.

"We're attempting this card game called "Spades," Cher and Mimi are a team, and Rob and me. We play a couple hands and start figuring out how it works, and everything's fine. Then she gets a really good hand, they get ahead, and start winning. Of course she has to gloat about it, and be totally annoying, until finally we catch up and get ahead. We manage to win the game and decide to gloat back at her, so she throws the whole deck of cards on the floor and storms out of the room!"

"I can't stand being around her when she's like that. I wish she could just play her computer games—it doesn't matter if she gets mad at the computer when she loses, but to have to be around when she's in one of her bad moods ... it's just wrong!"

"That doesn't sound so great. I'm sure Cher talked to her afterwards though, no?" said Luke.

"Well, yes, but what good is that going to do? She'll never change. I just wish she would go away," Gianna emphatically stated.

"Hmm. I'm so sorry, that is a bummer. I'm sure though that the Lord must have some solution, and that there must be something positive to gain from this experience," Luke responded.

"Like what?" pouted Gianna.

"Well, I can think of a few things, but I'm not sure I want to just tell you what I think some of the possible answers could be," said Luke.

"Why not?" Gianna questioned.

"Because I think if you think about it a bit, you just may be able to come up with some of them yourself," replied Luke.

"Maybe so," Gianna said softly.

After a few moments of contemplation, Gianna said, "Well, maybe Mimi can learn to be a better loser."

"True, everyone needs to learn to be able to both win and lose when it comes to games," agreed Luke.

"Maybe I can be more loving and not gloat if I win to make it easier for her," added Gianna.

"Those are both good things. I'm sure there are more as well. You see, at first glance it may seem like things are going worse than ever, but when we stop to think about it a bit more, we can start to see there are a lot of good things everyone can learn just from playing games together. In the end our unity will be strengthened as we each begin to learn the different lessons the Lord has for us, and soon we'll truly be one big happy Family," explained Gianna's dad.

Wow! Gianna thought, as more ideas of things they could learn that would eventually help them be able to get along better and enjoy each others' company more came to her mind.

Key promise: The keys of love and unity will go to work on your behalf as you do your part to love, learn, make amends, apologize, forgive, and do all you can to live in harmony with your Family.

A Hidden Miracle

"It's really raining out there," said Dave as he slumped down in the large, faded armchair near the window.

"Yeah," responded Sam, his head buried in the *Xn*.

"I guess that wipes out our weekend plans, if the weather report is right," replied Dave.

"It's going to be one *grrreat* indoor weekend," Sam said a bit sarcastically.

With the fundraising team gone for a month, and the renewal in full swing, Sam and Dave's weekend options seemed to be disappearing fast.

"Maybe Rosa will still want to go out," said Dave, trying to remain optimistic about the situation.

"I doubt it," responded Sam. "Not with Jamie having a cold. We are indoors for the weekend, so let's just face it."

"This is going to hurt—no movies, no novels, and nothing to do," Sam finished, with an air of finality in his voice.

The boys had explored and re-explored their Home since moving there in early May. The idea of climbing up three flights of stairs to explore a musty attic filled with old books and furniture that had been left there by the landlord did not appeal to the boys that much any more. They had hoped to go to town with Rosa and little Jamie to see the sights and visit the old castle, but all of that seemed unlikely with the weather being as it was now.

"Well, I'm off to get some breakfast," stated Sam, as he closed his Word book and made his way across the creaky wooden floorboards to the kitchen. Dave continued to sit there gazing aimlessly out the window at the falling rain. As he stared at his reflection in the window, he thought to himself, *Jesus, please do something. I'm feeling so bored. Please make my day.*

Dave could hear Sam banging around in the kitchen. After a few moments he decided to follow him, conceding that being bored was one thing, but being bored and hungry was another thing altogether.

"Give me a hand and pull out one of the pans," called Sam. Dave wandered into the old wooden kitchen, reached into the pan cabinet, gave a quick jerk, and before he knew it, held half-a-dozen stacked pans in his one hand.

He swung around, quickly looking for a place to land his falling load. Missing the counter by inches, all 15 kilos of cast-iron pans hit the floor with a resounding thud, followed by an echoing "Sssssssshhh!" from up the stairs.

"Real smooth!" barked Sam in a whisper. "There goes sleep-in morning for Rosa and Jamie. Boy, are we going to hear about this."

"Did you hear me, Dave?" repeated Sam. Dave just stood there, quite oblivious to the fact that he had just woken everyone up.

"Dave, are you deaf?" Sam said, as he leaned closer toward him. Dave was staring intently at the wooden floorboards, still not answering.

"Which pan did you break?" Sam asked again.

"Nothing broke," Dave answered finally. "But I could have sworn that the far end of the floorboard popped up when those pans hit it."

"Believe me, those floorboards weren't the only thing that 'popped up' when you dropped those pans," answered Sam. "I think half the neighborhood also 'popped up' out of bed!"

"No, I am serious here!" replied Dave, not really appreciating Sam's humor.

"Look at the dirt that was dislodged from the joints on this end," Dave said pointing to a neat line of soil that was pushed out of the crack on the far end of the board.

"I don't think this board is nailed down at all," observed Dave.

Sam retorted, "Great! The pans all survived, but we broke the floor."

Dave ignored Sam's comment and quietly walked over to the tool drawer, where he pulled out a crowbar.

"How about we get the pans off the floor before we move on," said Sam, not quite understanding what Dave was doing.

"Sure, just move them off this floorboard," replied Dave, his mind clearly somewhere else.

Dave inserted the crowbar into the exposed crack and gently pried the floorboard up. It came up easily at first, but stopped midair at a certain point a couple of inches above the ground.

Sam, looking on in amazement said, "Keep pulling it up!"

"I can't," answered Dave. "That's as far as it goes."

"This is interesting," piped up Sam. "We are prying the house apart on sleep-in morning. Won't Rosa be thrilled when she comes downstairs?"

"Oh, stop it, Sam," Dave replied casually, as he continued to examine the lower end of the floorboard.

"Why don't you make yourself useful and get me a flashlight," Dave said, as he got up and walked back over to the raised end of the board. Then with a quick, calculated yank, Dave pulled the board toward himself, and to his amazement the entire board slid free.

Dave, not realizing Sam had just walked in with the flashlight, said, "Thanks, Sam, but I don't need the flashlight anymore. The board just needed a yank in the right direction."

"Since I got the flashlight, I'm checking it out to see if there is anything in there. By the way, I am keeping the loot from this little adventure," Sam replied with a smile.

Dave did not bother to respond. Both were soon peering into the dark, empty space below. After a few minutes of digging around, Sam sighed as he said, "There's nothing there but cobwebs, straw, and rat turds."

"Well, then the recovered treasure is certainly yours," Dave replied, with a slow grin as he continued to shift through the straw on the dirt surface.

"Here, hand me the flashlight for a second," Dave said, as he reached out and began to search more intently. Dave soon pulled a small wooden chest no bigger than a cigar box from the dark opening in the floor.

"Look what I found!" exclaimed Dave as he showed it proudly to Sam.

"Well, open it up, Dave!" Sam exclaimed.

Dave set the box carefully on the kitchen counter and began to examine the hinges. The box seemed to be hinged on the front and back. After carefully pulling out the pins on one side, the box opened easily.

To their dismay, the box seemed to contain nothing but old, official-looking, personal papers all written in the local language.

Both boys were obviously disappointed with their find. They had hoped in those few short minutes to find a cache¹ of treasure that would solve their Home's financial problems forever. Times had not been easy since they had moved to this new location, and the Home was often short on funds. Plus, they were not exactly popular in the small clannish² town they had moved to in the countryside.

"Well, at least finding that box was fun, even if the papers aren't worth much," said Dave after a few minutes of silence.

"I wonder what the papers are for?" Sam replied.

"I have no idea. Maybe when the road team gets back they can show it to the landlord," Dave answered.

The boys showed the box to Rosa later that morning, who tried to decipher the papers. But even though she was a national who spoke the local language, she couldn't make much sense out of them. So the box of "funny papers" went up to the attic to collect dust along with all the other relics that contained the history of this old house. The kitchen floor was repaired shortly afterwards, the road team returned home, and with time, the whole adventure just seemed to fade away. It was not until a couple of months later when a local supporter came by for a visit that the significance of Sam and Dave's find came to light.

Mr. Potsdam owned the local dairy, and regularly gave donations of cheese to the Home. He was one of the few favorable people in the community who helped the Home, and would come by every now and then to visit. After watching the kids' presentation and gratefully receiving the kids' "thank you" card for his donation, Mr. Potsdam began talking about the history of the town and the castle, since he was native to the area and was well acquainted with its past.

Bringing his local history lesson to a close, he mentioned how the daughter of the baron of the castle had run away and taken the deeds and titles to the land and the large keep³, which, in time, had essentially messed up the inheritance rights for a large portion of the surrounding area. This had all taken place a good 100 or more years ago. The documents sadly were never recovered, but rumor abounded that they had been hidden somewhere in the village. None of this had been relevant until this point. Now that the ownership

of the land was in question, a large, unpopular real estate firm had become determined to acquire the land from a fraudulent seller, who the townspeople knew had no right to sell the land, but who could not be exposed without the missing documents. All the possible places in the village had been searched, but to no avail. By and by, the search had been called off and the land and castle were to be sold shortly.

Upon hearing this, the boys' curiosity was sparked. They looked at each other, and as politely as possible darted from the living room to the attic where they retrieved the box. They explained to a very puzzled Mr. Potsdam how they had found this box under the kitchen floorboards, and inquired if these, indeed, were the papers the entire village had been looking for.

Mr. Potsdam took the box and laid it carefully on the coffee table and began to examine the contents. After carefully looking over the old documents one by one, and becoming increasingly jubilant with each paper he picked up, he announced that Dave and Sam had indeed found the missing deeds to the land and castle!

News that the foreign missionaries' children had found the missing papers spread quickly through the small community. The town was elated, the sale of the land called off, and the dishonest seller exposed. People who had previously despised the missionaries came by to give their thanks, meet the boys who had found the papers, and look at the old kitchen with its creaking floorboards.

The Home was able to minister to much of the village, and a lot of people were won to the Lord and eventually became *Activated* subscribers. Sam and Dave now had plenty of friends who came over regularly to play games and practice their English. They hardly had a moment to themselves, as it seemed every kid in town wanted to befriend them and talk about how they had found the missing papers.

By and by, through their interaction with the other kids, Sam and Dave learned the local language fluently and would often be gone for hours at a time exploring the town and castle with the village kids, playing sports with them, or spending time telling them about the Lord.

As for the long road trips to their home countries to raise support that left the house nearly empty, well, they didn't seem to be needed anymore. The local community took it upon themselves to make sure the "foreign missionaries" had everything they could possibly need and more.

So if you are bored and find yourself with nothing to do, and it seems like it's raining on your plans, why not send up a prayer? Jesus can make your day, and work miracles for you too.

Key Promise: I will always come through for you when you put Me on the spot, and claim the power of the keys.

Definitions:

1. cache -- a secret place where a store of things is kept hidden
2. clannish--inclined to stick together as a group and exclude outsiders
3. keep--the innermost fortified part of a castle

A Pirate's Conversion

You might think that you know what my story is by the title. But I tell you, for a renegade like me, it meant a whole lot more than just simply giving my life to Jesus. Here's my story, as true as it gets.

* * *

"Down to the docks with ya'!" roared Captain Lonewolf. "And the rest of ya, get a move on! We ain't a bunch of sissy, dilly dalliers. We've got to get this booty* to the cove before we get stopped." (*seized or stolen valuables.)

This was the life of Captain Lonewolf and his crew. He bellowed instructions, his crew followed, most of the time, and together they were a pretty motley lot of pirates, feared by all.

Wherever they went, they wreaked havoc on the towns and villages. There was never a warm welcome or home for them anywhere.

They got back to the cove, parked the booty, and were on their way again, off to the next town to find a new load of booty. But on this particular day, the winds weren't in their favor. They blew on the ship, beating it this way and that, until it was driven way off course. They ended up far from the place they had intended to go.

By the time the storm had died down, the men were starving and sea-worn. Landing near a fishing village, the first land they spotted, the men crawled onto the beach weary and worn, instead of storming the village as they would have normally done. "Get up, you cowards, and give it your damnedest!" Captain Lonewolf bellowed, but to no avail.

By and by, people from the town appeared on the shore, carrying food and drink for the poor men. Captain Lonewolf sat to the side, grumbling that his men weren't doing their job. "How in the world can we expect to be feared if people look upon us as a bunch of vagabonds, weary and starving?" he muttered. Then as if some revelation had struck him, he looked around. *There is something very familiar about this town*, he thought. *We've been here before. We've raided these very shores. Why are these people feeding us when they know who we are and what we have done to them before?*

* * *

Well, you guessed it. By and by the captain and all his crew were led to salvation by the forgiving and simple people of this town. The former pirates determined to change their lives and live like real Christians.

Now this isn't by any means the end of the story. Captain Lonewolf became a Christian and this was good, but getting rid of his vices was one of the hardest things of all. He had been raised with the idea that things that were bad were good and things that were good were bad, and he had a lot of relearning to do, to become a good man.

Stealing, for example, was not a good thing in the life of a Christian, but that was a revelation to Lonewolf. Cursing and yelling were not true reflections of the sample of Jesus, and he had to learn to have a milder tongue. His whole life had to be turned over, and this took a lot of patient teaching from others and a lot of humble learning for him. But by and by he became a changed man. He grew to love Jesus so much that he was willing to make the changes he needed to for the Lord's sake. In time, Jesus blessed him by giving him a beautiful Christian wife and wonderful children.

Key promise: As you claim the power of the keys, I can make things easy that were once difficult, and I can build new habits where there were once no habits. I can renew and remake you, as you call on the power of the keys.

A Problem on Glastar

Operator 479 was busy at work on Glastar, the space station he called home. He was one of a large group of robots who were responsible for the life support system of the space station. Standing two feet tall, with wheels for feet and two sets of arms, these robots were called the glastabots.

Each glastabot had a specific duty, but together were needed to be sure the life support system on the space station kept running smoothly. Among other things, the glastabots made sure that the gravity remained at the correct level. They saw to it that the airflow was correctly regulated, and that the vents which brought the air to every part of the space station were free of debris and properly maintained. They kept the generator running that purified and recycled the air.

The glastabots were given their working instructions through the mainframe computer that would broadcast information onto a small screen located on their third arm. The screen would flash instructions and direct the robots in what their specific tasks were.

Operator 479's duty was to program and monitor the generator that purified and recycled the air. He was very pleased with this task. He had been doing it for a long time and was quite good at what he did.

"Operator 479," his screen flashed one day. "Your help is needed today in sector five, sub-section nine of the airflow system. There appears to be a problem in the vent. Please identify the problem and correct it as soon as possible."

"A problem in the vent?" he communicated back to the mainframe. "Isn't vent troubleshooting Operator 468's job?"

"Operator 468 has malfunctioned, and is unable to do his task," the screen read out.

Dragging his wheels through the vents on his way to Sector 5, Operator 479 grumbled. "Why am I being sent to perform this task? I have a very, very important job running the generator. I shouldn't have to be rolling through the vents troubleshooting problems."

Arriving at sub-section nine, 479 took a quick look around. "I can't see anything wrong," he stated, then turned and headed back.

After reporting to the mainframe that all was well, he was back on the job of monitoring the generator. "Ah, that's better," he whirred. "I'm just not fitted for the task of vent maintenance. There are other robots out there that are much better at those tasks, and that's excellent really, because I much prefer to stick here by the generator."

The following day, the air regulation monitoring systems registered serious problems in sector five, sub-section nine. The problems were also spreading to sub-section ten. Reports were coming in that there was breathing difficulty in those areas, and a strange, foul-smelling mist was filling the air.

Lights flashed, sirens wailed. Every glastabot was on alert. Special teams of glastabots were dispatched to the problem areas to find and eliminate the problem. It was ugly. It was difficult. It took a long time. But the glastabot teams bravely struggled on until they found a piece of food had fallen through a vent, gotten lodged there, and proceeded to rot, causing a vile smell that permeated more and more air space until it was discovered. They cleaned out the rotten material and regained control of the airflow in sub-sections nine and ten.

Where, you may ask, was Operator 479 while all of this was going on? Yes! He was right next to his generator, and he was doing the job he liked to do. However, it was a very sorry 479 who operated the generator that day. Because he had been unwilling to fill in for another glastabot, and had done a poor job at it, he bore a lot of the responsibility for the problems that had been caused. Right there and then, Operator 479 determined that he would become a very helpful robot in the future.

And he did. Operator 479 became known throughout Glastar as one of the most helpful robots aboard the space station. Not only did he do his own tasks well, but he cheerfully filled in for other robots when they had malfunctioned or needed extra assistance. He also spent his free time programming himself to be able to perform other tasks on the space station.

Eventually, Operator 479 was awarded "Most Useful Robot" status, and to this day can still be seen rolling silently down the halls of the Glastar space station, quietly and cheerfully performing whatever tasks have been assigned to him, as well as filling in wherever he sees a need.

* * *

Aaron rolled his Lego robot through the space station. He had a new task for Operator 479 to embark on when Dad popped his head through the door.

"Aaron, we need your help on dishes tonight!"

"I'm not on dishes tonight, Dad. It's Melissa's turn."

"I know. But she's not feeling well and needs to get to bed early. I'd really appreciate it if you could fill in for her. We can finish dishes more quickly that way and still have time for our Bible study tonight."

Aaron looked at the Lego robot in his hand and thought for a moment. *I'm going to be as helpful as Operator 479 turned out to be.* With a smile, he headed towards the kitchen.

Reports are still coming in that Aaron performs his tasks around the Home with precision, skill, and cheerfulness, and his Home is seriously considering giving him the coveted "Operator 479" merit award.

Key promise: Claim the keys and be instant in season and out of season. The keys of cheerfulness and helpfulness will help you to be a big blessing.

A Special Call

Long ago, in the days when things were not so modern, there lived a young man, a very special young man. He wasn't special in the way you would think; there was nothing particularly handsome about him, nothing particularly outstanding about him. He grew up, pretty much like you or me, in a normal home, with a mom and dad who loved him, cared for him, and taught him the ways of God.

But there was a seed of something special there. Deep within his heart, he knew there was something coming. He didn't know what it was, or when it would reach his doorstep, but he knew one day he would find that elusive "special" something and he'd know right then, that that was for him and him alone.

He passed his days, growing up, filled with the joys of life, and also the mundane tasks and chores, the hours of learning, the days of wishing he could be somewhere else, doing something else, wondering what was his purpose for being on this earth.

Questions tumbled through his head and answers were slow in coming. It was hard to see what really was important in life. Some things looked more

interesting than others. He wondered, "Would he follow in his father's footsteps? Would he branch out and do something important with his life? Would it be exciting? Would it be worth it? Would it be fun?"

The temptations came, mostly in his mind, the thoughts of what he could be if only given a chance. "Would he be as the rich men in his town who had the best wines, the best perfumes, and the greatest homes? Would he perhaps be as the revered religious leaders, looked up to by the people? Would he be important? Would he be someone that others thought grand and wise?"

One day the call came. His "special" call, tailored perfectly for him. But it was not a grand call, not special in the ways of men, but special in the sight of God: "Would he be willing to be made of no reputation? Would he be willing to speak out and proclaim God's truth? Would he be willing to be reviled of men, ridiculed for being so different? Would he be willing to leave his home, his friends, his family, and travel through the wilderness places? Would he be willing to even give his life for the message God spoke through him?"

This was not the call he had anticipated, but he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that this was his call. His heart leapt to embrace it and he took the stand. He became what God asked him to be. He poured forth his life in service to God. He spoke the Word of God with boldness. He obeyed His call. He was special in the sight of God. His name was John the Baptist, the one who didn't care what men thought, but only what God thought, who obeyed and gave his all and prepared the way of the Lord.

Keys Promise: The goal and purpose of every missionary is to bring the lost into My heavenly fold. This is your calling as My disciples, and through the keys you can win the hearts of men.

All That Believed

As Paul settled into bed he remembered something he had read in united devotions that had stuck with him all day: "The Lord wouldn't be asking the Family to be His Endtime sample of communal living if it weren't possible."

He was in bed, but not ready to go to sleep. His mind was too full of the thoughts of what he had just read to the MCs for their bedtime story. He had done his best to present the story full of faith and conviction, knowing it was the message for the Family today. After the story he and the kids reviewed the verse, "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

As he lay in bed, he remembered there was a very similar verse later in Acts. He turned on his bedside lamp, pulled his Bible out from under the bed, and read the next two chapters of Acts until he came to the verses he was looking for, Acts 4:34 and 35: "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

How does that apply to the Family today? How does it apply to me? I don't have any houses or lands—and how would I "lay the money at the apostles' feet" if I did?

Paul drifted off to sleep. ...

* * *

Suddenly he seemed to be in a different place—a marketplace, with the noise and smells of fresh farm fruits and vegetables, the squealing of pigs, and the rustle of chickens in a small pen. He had a handful of fresh produce and was putting it into a smiling woman's basket.

"Would you like anything else?" he asked her politely.

"Two cabbages please, and that will be all," she replied, as she handed him three coins in exchange for her purchase.

He put the coins carefully in his pouch, and looked eagerly for the next customer. Then he glanced over at his sister Elena in the neighboring stall, who was waving to him, excited about something. There were no customers coming immediately, so Paul stepped over to ask what was up.

"Jeremiah's father just came by and bought ten of our chickens!" she said excitedly. "He said they were having a party tomorrow, and need to prepare for a big feast. And then he talked with Mom and invited us to come too! Isn't that fun?"

"Wow! Yes," he replied. "I haven't seen Jeremiah for awhile since he's been sick. I'm so glad he's better."

"Yes," said Elena. "That's what they're having the party for, to thank God he's healed."

Paul stepped back to his stall as he saw a woman and two small children approaching. "Hello Paul, I need some parsley and some beets, please," she asked.

He knew Marianne, and that her husband had died a few months ago. As was their family's custom, he not only put what she asked for in her basket, but added a bunch of carrots. *They always did their best to care for the fatherless and widows.* Marianne smiled gratefully, and continued on her way.

The sun was high overhead now, and many people were closing their market stalls to get out of the heat of the day. Paul helped his mom and Elena pack up everything into their small cart and they headed for home.

They were surprised to find Dad already in from the fields and washing up at the well. He smiled cheerfully and said, "The crops are all in. We're almost ready for our trip to the city to sell what we won't need."

"Oh hurray! Wow, that's even another reason to celebrate!" exclaimed Elena.

Dad looked at her, puzzled, until she explained about the party Jeremiah's family was having.

We are so happy, Paul thought, smiling. *What a wonderful family and life we have. God is so good to us.*

"We had a very good crop this year," Dad was saying. "We'll have much more than we need for our little family. I heard from Malachi that the Apostle Paul was in the city and preparing for another one of his journeys. When we're there, we can go see him and give him a contribution for our brethren he is going to minister to. They're in need of food and supplies, because there's a drought in their area."

Mother smiled happily as she gave Dad a big hug. "Yes, that's a wonderful idea. I'm so happy the Lord gives us what we need, and even more, so we have it to share with others."

* * *

Paul felt the warm sun shining in through a crack in his curtains. He looked at the open Bible on his bed, and the bedside light still on. He heard the children in the next room getting up and smelled breakfast cooking downstairs, and knew he was late getting up. As he scrambled into his clothes, he thanked the Lord for his Home and the Family, and pulled his new memory key promise from his promise box: "Call on key power for every need, and it will be done for you."

What a super key! he thought. *"Every need"—we are the richest people on earth! We only have to call and God will supply!*

"Thank You, Jesus, for taking such good care of us," he praised. "Please help me to always have a thankful heart, and to be willing to be like the family in my dream, to share what I have with all who need it."

He glanced over at the two cool T-shirts he had just received from their provisioning contact, and knew what he was going to do.

Key promise: The keys can change your heart, mind, and spirit and make your Home an Endtime sample of sharing and living together in love and harmony.

An Activated Rush

This week's Saturday activity was a united *Activated* push. The three Homes in the area were having a contest, and the Home to get the most subscriptions was going to get a prize that night at the united barbecue! There was a catch though—this particular contest was organized by the JETT/Teen board, and the subscriptions only counted toward this prize if someone between the ages of 12 and 15 was not only on the team that got the subscription, but actively participated by helping to talk to the person!

As much as Justin wanted to be inspired and participate, he couldn't help but feel like this was just going to be too difficult. At the end of devotions, as his Home planned their "attack," Gabe (SGA) noticed Justin didn't seem too enthusiastic. "Justin, do you wanna be my partner?" He asked, and added quietly, "I have a plan, and we just might win."

"Sure, why not." After prayer and JJT, Justin and Gabe took off along with two other teams. Gabe drove, and by the time they had finished praise time and united prayer vigil, it was time to drop off Dad and Emmy. Toni and Carl were the third team, and got off in a good "shop to shop" area of town.

"So what's your plan?" Justin asked, as soon as the others were gone.

"I have an appointment." Gabe smiled. Justin knew by the look on his face that this was going to be something good. "There's this businessman a bit further downtown who sponsored videos for a school a couple months ago. He subscribed to *Activated*, and the Lord showed me to make an appointment with him today to see if he'll get *Activated* subscriptions for his employees. I wasn't super sure about it, so I made a fleece that if he was working this Saturday, I'd do it, and lo and behold. ..."

"Cool," Justin said. "So, what do I have to do?"

"Heh, heh! I had an idea. What if I start talking to him, since I know him and all that, and then I'll tell him that we have an offer and you're going to make it," said Gabe.

"Me? The whole thing? Couldn't I just like, I don't know, say, 'These are really good magazines' or something at some point?" said Justin.

"You could, but I have a feeling that if you offer it, he won't be able to refuse," replied Gabe.

"Hmm, it's possible. But what do I say?" Justin questioned.

"I don't know exactly. I have a hard time personally planning what I'm going to say. I just have this favorite key promise I claim, and it works, and the

Lord always gives me some inspiration about what to say to the particular person I'm talking to," answered Gabe.

"Okay, and that is...?" asked Justin.

"The keys of boldness are strong and commanding. They remove fear, inspire, and create a channel for My Spirit to flow through you," Gabe replied.

"I have an idea," Justin said. "But what if it doesn't work?"

"Well, it will be up to the choice our friend makes," said Gabe. "I do have a plan B though."

* * *

As Gabe and the man were discussing how much he and his wife both like the *Activated* magazines, Justin took the plunge. "We wanted to offer you the opportunity to get subscriptions to the magazine for your employees too. We're trying to get these magazines into as many peoples' hands as possible. It's our 'Change the World' push, like that story that's in one of the first magazines. We know that the more people who come to know Jesus, and learn how to live for Him—helping others, caring, sharing, giving, and all those good things—the better things will become, not only for the world in general, but for your company as well. So we thought you might like to help us, since you know the magazines, and what a help they are in learning about the Bible, as well as how to apply it and live it in modern, practical ways."

* * *

"What do you know?" Gabe said. "It worked! You did GREAT! I'm gonna have you explain the *Activated* mags from now on. I'll introduce us and all that, and when it comes to the mags, you're going to talk."

"It's a miracle! The keys totally came through for me! I've heard you and Dad and other people offer subscriptions, but never actually done that part," Justin exclaimed.

Mr. Johnson had been so impressed by Justin's boldness and conviction that he decided to take ten subscriptions for his employees. And that was just the beginning. As Justin shared his testimony with everyone, he marveled at how the Lord had come through for each one of them in a different, but nonetheless amazing way. The prize they won didn't even come close to the rush it was to be personally involved in the most "happening" move of the Family. They all agreed to have another push the following Saturday.

Key promise: The keys will give you boldness and open doors you never thought possible before.

An Open Door

"Why did Andy have to leave? He was my best friend and life is just miserable without him. I mean, I could handle it for a while. I was reading *The Lord of the Rings* and I had my computer games, movies, and stuff. But now, that we've entered the renewal it's harder than I thought. Life is such a drag!" blurted out 13-year-old Tim in response to his brother's question, "How ya' doing, Bro?"

Alan continued, "I'm so sorry; it sure sounds like you're not having the greatest time of your life. It was kinda hard for me as well. But hey, this doesn't happen all the time. See it as an open door to do things you haven't done before, and probably wouldn't have ever done, because you had no need to break out of the norm when you wanted to have fun. We can go hiking, camping, you name it! You'll get to hang out with your friends!"

"I don't know anyone else around here," Tim said, as he looked down.

"Well, it's time you meet people," Alan replied. "I heard someone say that there was going to be a game night at one of the Homes in the city and a barbeque afterwards. That's gotta be fun. I'll be right beside you the whole time. You'll see how nice people are and what you have in common."

Well, the evening was great. Tim got out of himself and met some other guys his age who had the same story and could relate to him. They decided to make an activity committee and Tim was one of the members. He now spent his free time looking for activities, as well as studying the Word and pulling out quotes so that everything they did was Word-related. That way they could do it more often. He was bursting with ideas of things to do, and actually felt fulfilled and busy. Best of all, he was able to bond with his brother who before had seemed to be too busy but was now taking time to help him out, and they became great friends. And all this just because he gave change a chance.

Key Promise: Call on the keys and step out and try something new today. The keys can turn your old routine in an adventure blessed by the Lord.

Anthor And The Roving Academy (Part 1)

"I'm sorry, Anthor, but maybe you'll do better next year."

The words had haunted Anthor for the last four days. It was the second time he had tried to qualify for the Roving Academy, and the second time he had not been accepted. It would be another 185 days before he could take the test again. Why did a year have to go by so slowly?

He lay in the grass outside his house, staring up at the sky and the colorful patterns that floated gently across it. Anthor knew from his studies for the Academy that they were caused by a layer of dense moisture that floated near the upper edge of the atmosphere, and which protected their planet from the radiation of their triple suns. But he wasn't thinking of that right now. His only thought was on making it into the Roving Academy this year.

Anthor was a young Drik, an insect-like creature on a world his people called Neval, and his dream, like that of many Driks, had always been to some day be accepted into the Roving Academy.

Roving was the Drik word for exploring, and while there was plenty of roving to be done on their own planet--and this was not difficult, because every Drik had the ability to fly for great distances--at the Roving Academy Driks were trained and equipped for extra-terrestrial roving--to fly past the colorful sky and find out what lay beyond it.

This had been Anthor's dream for as long as he could remember, and he wondered why they hadn't accepted him this time. He'd done lots and lots of studying, but still that hadn't been enough. He hadn't done so well on the flying tests and tests for speed and endurance, and he wondered if he'd ever be able to make it.

Just then his keen eyes spotted another Drik high in the sky. He knew it was from the Academy, because normal Driks couldn't fly that high. To Anthor's amazement, he watched the Drik swoop down and land right in front of him.

"You Anthor Drekkenvik?" the Drik asked.

"Yes, I am," Anthor answered. "Who are you?"

"I'm Lebor Androwik. I was sent to find you and give you a few tips about how to better prepare for the Academy. You do plan to apply again next year, right?"

"I wasn't sure," Anthor replied. "It just seems that no matter how much I know, I never pass the wing tests."

"Yes, I've noticed your wings are still a little small for your age, and lack color. Do you spend a lot of time outside?"

"Sometimes, but not that often," Anthor confessed.

"Well, that's one of the main secrets to getting your wings," Lebor answered. "The more they are exposed to the bright light of our three suns--both the brighter light when all three are in the sky, and the lesser light when only one of

them is--the bigger and stronger they become, until when you look close, you can see them shimmer with the same colors of the sky."

With this, Lebor flexed and extended his great wings for Anthon to see.

Looking closely, Anthon could in fact see the same colors swirling through Lebor's wings as swirled through the sky.

"That's how you know you are ready," Lebor continued. "I can help you and show you how to get these wings. And if you're willing to spend some extra time every day training with me, then by the time they start accepting new Driks into the Academy, I think you can be ready for it."

And so Anthon did. He was very happy for Lebor's help. And sure enough, by the time 185 days had passed, Anthon's wings had grown almost twice the size they had been before, and shone with all the colors of the sky.

And sure enough, he passed the Roving Academy entrance exams with flying colors, and learned many other things there. But that is a new story.

Key promise: My Word will strengthen your faith and cause you to grow by leaps and bounds as you call on the keys.

Anthon's Lessons (Part 2)

"Hi, Anthon. How's it going?" It was Lebor, coming to pay Anthon a visit.

"Oh, hi, Lebor," Anthon replied. "It's just great. I'm learning so much here. I remember being discouraged when they wouldn't allow me into the Roving Academy the first two times I tried. I knew there were things I had to learn, but I figured I would learn them in the Academy. But now I can see why they were so important. There're so many cool things to learn here, but I wouldn't have been ready for them if I hadn't learned the basics you helped me with first. So thank you."

"You're welcome," Lebor answered. "I'm glad you're enjoying yourself and learning new things now. I've been assigned a roving mission, so I wanted to come say goodbye, since it will probably be a little while before I return."

"Oh, congratulations. What sort of mission?" Anthon asked.

"We'll be making some orbital observations of Sola Menor, and studying its relations to the ionoflares on our moon."

"Wow, I wish I could go with you," Anthon said.

"Oh, don't worry. There'll be plenty of universe and spectacular spacescapes for you to discover and rove once you graduate. And the year will be over before you know it. Just think--only 19 more treeks and you'll have the first rank."

A treek was a Drikken week, divided into three periods of three days each, marked by the various stages of rotation of their three suns.

"Oh, Lebor, it's so hard not to think of what it would be like to have my fifth rank, like you, or even my seventh. Sometimes I wish I could just skip all these classes and get straight to the roving part. After all, I've done roving before, all around where I was born, and across other parts of the planet with you last year.

"It's not that difficult, and I don't see why I have to be sitting in classes and going through all the exercises when I could easily come with you."

Lebor looked at Anthor. A little smile played between his mandibles, but his pincers hid them. "You just said you were glad that you learned the basics with me before entering the Academy, and that this made it easier for you to grasp and do well at the lessons you're getting now. Well, in the same way, these grades and ranks all prepare you for the next rank. You have your Academy wings, but it takes a while for them to develop Extra-Terrestrial-Roving qualities. And that's what the training here is for.

"So just because you're in the Academy now, don't feel bad if you can't understand or even do everything you joined the Academy for right away. It's going to take time.

"All you have to do is take the lessons and tests as they come, one by one, and do your best to learn as much as possible from each one, because that's the surest way to get ready for whatever will come next.

"And that in itself is one of the biggest lessons you can learn for extra-terrestrial roving. A lot of things will happen, some good, some bad. But you can learn something from everything. The Academy is not just to learn things that you have to know, but to learn how to learn from things that happen. Because already knowing how to learn is as important out there as having your Academy wings is here."

"I think I understand," Anthor said.

With that, the two Driks bid each other farewell, and Anthor returned to his studies with a new perspective about why they were necessary.

Key promise: The keys can help you not to give up when you feel you still have a long ways to go, and to help you learn what you need to learn today, and to trust Me for what you will need to learn tomorrow.

Back in Focus

"I'll take the extra tapes back to the lit closet," Shana called back to her team as she bounded from the van. It had been a fantastic day out witnessing, and she was still a foot off the ground. Her thoughts were still filled with the girl she and Tanya had spent an hour witnessing to, who'd been so depressed that she said she was just wanting to end it all, but after an hour of feeding her, she had received Jesus and then totally changed.

This renewal is way better than the way things were before, she thought to herself. She liked the extra time spent doing something for others; it felt good to see people changed and to know she had a part in it.

As she closed the lit closet door, the sight of the TV and video player through the living room door brought another reality to mind. *Well, it would have been movie night, except that now movies were off the schedule and so were her times of reading novels.*

The glow of the day began to fade as she sat down in a chair in the living room, staring at the now blank screen and thinking of all the movies she wanted to watch. Just then her dad walked in. The sight of the screen and the look on Shana's face told the story.

He sat down silently beside her for a moment, then said, "Pretty big hole, huh?" It took a minute to register what he was talking about.

"I found some good doughnut dough today on the MO site to fill it with, though, if you want to give it a try." he said with a grin.

Shana laughed, even though she didn't really feel like it. The picture in her mind of herself sticking her head glumly through a huge doughnut hole as she stared at the TV screen was too much for her.

"What is it?" she asked, her interest slightly sparked. *After all*, she thought, *it couldn't be any worse than what I'm doing at the moment.*

"There were some stories, biographies of missionaries' lives, on the MO site today. I downloaded some, and they are really inspiring. I think you might enjoy reading them. Wanna try?" he prodded.

The grey clouds were still hanging close by and threatening to move back in.

"Okay, I guess so. I'd better get cleaned up now, though—I need to help with the toddlers till dinner," she said, thinking that at least that would help keep her mind off all she was having to give up. The thrills of the day were now all but lost in the bummer that was growing by the minute.

After dinner Shana found a small pile of papers on her bed. Remembering what her dad had said, she plopped down to skim through these "great missionary stories."

I mean, how good could a story be about some person out in the jungle somewhere? They probably didn't get to watch movies either, or play computer games or anything, she thought to herself as she began to scan the page. It

didn't take more than a couple of sentences, though, to catch her attention, and she didn't even notice when the others came into the room an hour later.

How could these missionaries do this? she wondered as she read the accounts of their lives. The stories told of those who endured heartbreak, were rejected by their religious denominations, lacked funding, were discriminated against and discouraged from going to the mission field by friends, family and churches. They traveled long, grueling sea voyages, encountered hostile natives, and lacked basic supplies. Their daily battles consisted of disease, loneliness, being ostracized by those they came to help, and some were set upon by cannibals. They gave up their lives in helping others to find Jesus, speaking only of the joy and fulfillment it brought them. What struck Shana was that many of them weren't even as educated and well brought up in the love and admonition of Lord as she was, but rather were just ordinary people who heard a sermon, received the call of the Lord, and followed it.

Just then a picture of the young woman who'd been ready to end it all flashed through Shana's mind, and the feelings of love and desperation she felt as she gave her verse after verse and watched as each one resulted in a glimmer of hope in the woman's eyes. She remembered the high she had felt, seeing that life changed, and that she could help do something like that.

Suddenly the idea of spending hours watching a movie or reading a book that really didn't change anything seemed dull and boring compared to diving into something so fully as these people had chosen to do. It was all beginning to make sense. The whole point of the renewal time was to give everyone a chance to get things back in focus and to realize that there were better and more exciting things out there than parking yourself for hours in front of a computer or TV or a book that really didn't have any point to it. Suddenly things weren't looking so bad anymore.

Shana hopped up to see if there were still any openings on the witnessing teams tomorrow.

Looks like I've found a new addiction, she thought to herself, as she scanned the bulletin board for the witnessing teams list.

Bible verse: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1John 3:16.)

Key promise: The power of the keys will become a personal reality to you as you claim their strength in your fight for change. They will not fail you, so long as you don't fail to avail yourself of their power.

Bobby's Commitment

Bobby stood dejectedly against the trunk of an old tree in the backyard, remembering all the good times he used to have. He was deep in thought and didn't notice his younger brother come up behind him.

"Bobby," said his brother. "Can you help build my model airplane?"

"Leave me alone, Mark. Can't you see I'm thinking?" said Bobby.

"But can you do it in a few minutes," Mark persisted.

"No, I'm sorry, Mark. Can't you try to find someone else?" Bobby replied.

At first Bobby didn't want to acknowledge his brother and continued to ignore him. After a while, his brother ran off.

Bobby didn't always refuse his younger brother's requests. Right now, though, Bobby was completely focused on what a downer it was that he was having to give up all the "fun" things he had been able to do before, like playing computer games or watching movies. Also there were times when he wished he wasn't on the field. He thought, *How cool it would be to be able to go watch all the new movies in a theater.*

Bobby finally decided it was time to go inside and see if there was anything to do. As he walked around the house, he saw his sister helping with cooking and his brother building his model airplane with someone else. Bobby's parents had just come back from outreach and were giving testimonies about some of the things that had happened that day.

As he continued to look around, Bobby realized that he was the only one not having fun, and it wasn't that he couldn't be doing something he enjoyed, it was because he didn't want to do anything. He wanted to just sit and wait for the renewal to be over with. Then Bobby remembered the GN where the Lord and Mama had said that if you just wait around for the renewal to be over, you won't be getting anything out of this time like you should, and you won't grow in the ways that the Lord wants you to.

Bobby thought, *I wonder if I've learned anything so far.* He headed off to his room and got out his prophecy book and looked at the last date he had entered something. The last date was almost a week before! It wasn't that Bobby didn't like hearing from the Lord nor that he didn't have a good channel, it was that he didn't want to let go and enter in to what the Lord was asking him to do. Sometimes he wished that he could just sleep his way through this time, but he knew that this time wasn't something to just be gotten through, but it was a time to study and learn.

Then Bobby determined to do something profitable with his time, so with his prophecy book in hand he lay on his bed and prayed.

"Lord, You said in Your Word that we will only get out of this time as much as we're willing to put into it. I know that I haven't put much effort into getting

what You have for me during this time. I know that You're doing Your part with providing activities to do that are centered more around Your Word, but I'm having a hard time forsaking my computer games and movies.

"I'm feeling really down. I need Your help to find the solution to my problem. I know there is so much that is planned for us to do, but I've been hoping that time will pass quickly by and that I'll be able to do the things I used to be able to do.

"So I ask You to help me, Jesus. Please show me what I need to do to get on board and not be left behind. I want to commit this renewal time to You and to really change." Then the Lord spoke to Bobby.

(Jesus:) My dear son, I understand how you feel. I know the things you're going through and how you wish things didn't have to change, but change is good for you. It helps you grow and progress. It may not seem like it right now, but at the end of the renewal you'll notice the difference. You'll be able to clearly see the things that you've changed in, but of course this all comes with a price. That price is your obedience to Me and My Word. I've asked you to lay aside these things during this time, not because I don't love you, but because I don't want anything distracting you from feeding on My Word and learning what I have for you.

There is a time and place for everything, and right now is the time to stay close to Me, to learn of Me, to sit at My feet and drink in as much as possible. You ask what you can do? Well, there is a lot that you can do. Earlier when your brother was asking for help, that was Me trying to get you to learn not to be selfish with your time, but to help others when they need it. When you went inside there was a lot going on, and you could have learned a lot from it. You could have gone and talked with your parents and heard the encouraging testimony that would have brightened up your day. You noticed that it was almost dinner time and that those cooking didn't seem to have the time to complete it all, so you could have gone and offered to help them with it.

There is so much going on around you that you notice, but don't do anything about. This is what the time of renewal is for you, not just for you to help others but for you to listen to Me, to hear what I want you to do. Because, as you listen to what I have to say, you'll see even more things that you could help with or learn from.

Not everything is going to involve you helping someone else. Sometimes I'll want you to just sit and listen and pray, pray for things that are going on around you, for those getting ready to go on outreach, or for the people taking care of the kids. Other times I want you to ask Me what you can learn from a situation. Perhaps something just happened between you and someone else, and you can ask Me what you can learn from that.

Don't fear if you forget here and there. Not everyone will at first remember to always ask Me. But as you practice, you'll see the fun things that you can do. Sure, not everything will be "fun" for each person, but instead of looking to

please yourself, look to please someone else. That's when you'll see that having fun isn't what you do for yourself, but it's what you can do for someone else. (*End of message from Jesus.*)

As Bobby sat reading over the message he'd just received, he began to think back on all the times when he was just sitting around waiting for things to happen, not trying to make it happen himself, but waiting for others to bring him something to do.

Bobby's thoughts were brought back to the present when someone knocked on the door, announcing that dinner was ready. As he got ready, Bobby decided to start trying out some of the things that the Lord had told him: "Watch and listen, for at each step there is something I wish for you to learn. It won't always be obvious, but ask Me each step of the way, and you'll see that there is a lot that you can do that is fun."

Key Promise: Keep your eyes off yourself and your situation, and on Me and the keys. Praise me even if you don't feel like it, and I will take care of the situation and bring about a "Romans 8:28" even from the most trying of circumstances.

Boheme's Brigade

Boheme: [Spirit being helper:] He is a great one, possessing all that is fit and uncompromising. He is sent to help free us from the physical or fleshly crutches and excesses that Bacchus tempts us with. (ML #3455.)

Bacchus: [A demon] whose jurisdiction is over the stronghold of addiction. His mission is to separate you from the Lord, to cause you to turn to your addictions--any number of physical or fleshly crutches and excesses. (GN 965.)

"Could I please speak to you, Boheme?"

"Speak, Lord, Your servant hears You."

"Boheme, a major offensive is being launched on My children during the renewal period to get them to resist, doubt, compromise, and yield to the ungodly addictions they have formed. I need your counsel on what we can do for our youth. They are going to be targeted heavily, as you know. They are impressionable and moldable, and since they are the greatest threat to Satan, I know he will be doing all he can to get to them. He's got Bacchus and his ilk on alert, spying out any opportunity to defeat My Family."

"My Lord, I have a special force of fighters I have been training who will be helping the Family to cut the tentacles of Bacchus. They've been nicknamed the Mighty DUCKS."

Jesus chuckled and said, "Boheme, I'm trying to get My children away from the movie scene."

"Yes, My Lord. I thought perhaps this might take that which some are familiar with and turn it to our benefit. DUCKS stands for Dedicated, Unconventional, Concerned, Key-power Soldiers. That's their goal, My Lord—to help turn each of Your children into a fighting Mighty DUCKS team."

"Boheme, you're young at heart! Thank you for being innovative and putting your all into fighting the Enemy and fighting for the hearts of My children to return to Me in spirit and in truth. This battle we are engaging is pivotal* in the Family's history. They have got to win it." (*pivotal: vitally important.)

"And win it they will, Sir! All their spirit helpers, and those You have given them to fight on their behalf, are ready, willing, able and waiting to kick the Devil back to Hell where he belongs and to cleanse the land!"

"I love you, Boheme. You've done a splendid job. Now let's pray for My children, that they will do their part and make the right decisions."

"Yes, my King. That is an important part they have, and we will surely be praying they come through for You."

"Thank you, Boheme. It's war time and time to attack."

"Onward and upward, my Lord. We will not stop until each evil minion is set back and the Enemy is defeated."

Key promise: No matter how difficult it is for you to let go of worldly influences in your life, you can be free of them when you call on the keys and My spirit helpers who I have sent to destroy the works of the Devil.

Captain Starblaster vs. the Mars-root

Captain Starblaster was surrounded by Martians, their expectant faces and quadruple sets of eyes all focused on him. He was thankful that the dim light their campfire provided wasn't quite bright enough to expose the tears forming in his eyes or the slight quiver in his firm and manly jaw.

Yes, Mars-root was that bad!

As the first earthman to visit Mars, he had come in peace. Thankfully, the Martians also had received him in peace. After the reception party in his honor, it was time to sample the local hospitality. Mars-beer was okay, but Mars-root was not. Water on Mars is not located above ground, but deep beneath the surface in underground caverns. The only thing that could be called an actual "plant" by Earth standards was Mars-root. Naturally, their society's food and drink revolved almost entirely around it.

Stout Captain Starblaster was the first to be offered the dark brown paste. It was ground Mars-root, and he was the first human to taste it. He thought he would be the last.

It tasted worse than anything you could ever imagine. Consider which vegetable you dislike the most in all the world, multiply it by ten, let it rot for a few years, then grind it into paste and you'll have something kind of like Mars-root. However, Captain Starblaster couldn't show his disgust. He was an emissary from Earth, commissioned by Star Command to establish friendly contact with the Martians. What could he do? What could any man do? Even though it seemed a dreadful thought to fathom eating such a thing, somehow he felt it was his destiny.

Brave Captain Starblaster managed to swallow.

He quickly brushed away the tear from his eye, put on his widest grin, and said, "Good!" The Martians erupted into cheers, twiggling their antennas together in an act kind of like clapping. They accepted permanent peace with Earth, and the two societies were joined together in eternal friendship.

But that's not quite the end of our story. "Captain Starblaster vs. the Mars-root" has an interesting ending. Captain Starblaster became the governor of the first Earth colony on Mars. Not only was he able to endure Mars-root during the public feasts for diplomatic purposes, but he came to quite enjoy the stuff. As he learned more about it, he found that the initial terrible taste was not in fact so terrible, but was actually quite interesting, and it was only that he was so accustomed to eating Earth food that made the Mars-root taste strange. Soon he stopped eating Earth food entirely and lived solely on Mars-root and Mars-beer.

He grew 1 foot and 9 inches after that. He didn't grow a third eye, but even in gravity boots he could leap twice his own height, remember complete books after reading them only once, detect the sound of spacecraft landing half a hemisphere away, and for some reason, became allergic to lemonade. The Martians gave him the affectionate name of "Roothead," and he was loved by human and Martian alike till the end of his life, which, did we mention, was 370 years long?

Key Promise: If it's My will for you, there is nothing the keys can't help you like or get used to.

Catching the Missionary Fever

"One week, and it already feels like it's been six months!" Tom stared blankly at the GN page he'd been reading, then at the nearly empty bookshelf on the wall above his bed. The books he'd been so accustomed to collecting each week at the library were now gone. They had been kind of interesting, stories and mysteries, and sometimes he'd read them just out of habit to pass the time, but now he was going stir crazy!

It was his free day and he'd had some Word time already and wasn't so used to reading the Word for longer periods. It was feeding, but after awhile his brain seemed to start spinning. He wanted to read something, but what?

A soft knock on the door jolted Tom back to reality. "Yes?" he answered.

"Hi, I'm sorry to bother you, Tom. I just thought you might like to see something I found on the Audio Key this morning." It was Jim, Tom's older teen brother, and the person he looked up to more than anyone else in the world. His mind raced, "If Jim was interested in it, this had to be good. Maybe there was some hope."

"I was looking around for something to read and saw these missionary stories. Some are a bit old-fashioned, but most are really interesting. I printed out a couple for you to read; you don't have to if you don't want to. You're probably pretty busy I guess," continued Jim, knowing it'd be easier for Tom to get into them if he didn't do a hard-sell, but just left it to Tom to decide.

"Well," stalled Tom. He didn't want to sound too enthusiastic, and besides, he'd read a couple of missionary stories once before that his relatives had sent them, and they were so full of preaching and how perfect the missionary had been all his life, that he'd found them pretty boring and dry, so he had his doubts that these could be very interesting. But then, why would Jim be turned on by these? Maybe he could at least look them over.

"Okay," mumbled Tom, as he glanced at Jim. "I guess I could give'm a try a little later on. Thanks, Jim." He looked back at the empty bookshelf as Jim put the printouts on the desk and slipped out of the room. *What have I got to lose?* he thought.

"Huge crocodiles dozing on the muddy banks of the mighty Congo sullenly opened their beady eyes to gaze at the strange monster, then hastily plunged into the river."

"Not a bad beginning, I could get into this," Tom thought as he thumped onto the bed.

Two hours and several stories later, Tom finally surfaced for lunch.

"What have you been up to all morning, bro?" asked Jim, as he set his plate on the table next to Tom. "Did you get a chance to look at any of those stories?"

Tom didn't answer for a moment. He was still having trouble coming back to reality. "Are those really true stories? I mean, I thought we were the only ones who were supposed to be so sold out. Sometimes I get to thinking we're a bit weird, you know, 'cause we're the only ones who are willing to go that far. But here these people really did some exciting and cool things for the Lord. I'd like to have a life like that. You know, something that really changes things and makes a difference. Do you think we'll end up in a jungle some day, or out where God's going to have to do miracles like that for us?"

Jim had to stop and think for a moment. He wasn't quite prepared for this. "Well, maybe we won't be in the same position, out there in the jungle trying to reach some hostile tribe, but since we're heading into some pretty dark times, I think we'll have our own set of exciting and impossible situations to face that are going to take miracles of the keys--miracles that are every bit as big or bigger than the ones in the stories you read. Besides, you see miracles every day when you go out witnessing and winning souls. Maybe they aren't as showy right now, but they're still miracles.

"You know what turned me on about those stories?" Jim said in a more serious and deep way than Tom was used to. "It was their conviction that no matter what they were asked to do by the Lord, they just did it. It didn't matter if it looked like it would cost them their lives or whatever, and sometimes it did, but they knew even then it was more than worth it. I guess that's why they had such amazing lives."

Tom was silent, lost in thought the rest of the meal. But as Jim got up to leave, Tom asked, "Do you think there are more of those stories on the MO site?" He was hoping to see a smile light up Jim's face, and he wasn't disappointed. "Sure, I'll pull down some more this afternoon," Jim said, as he strolled towards the kitchen thinking to himself, "I sure hope there are more waiting and ready to download, Lord, 'cause it looks like You've got a fiery new missionary taking shape there."

Bible verse: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matthew. 25:40.)

Key promise: As you claim the keys of the Kingdom to yield to My will in your life, I will lighten your burdens and cares and bless you with new joy that you didn't have before.

Cenotaph*

(*A monument erected as a memorial to a dead person or dead people buried elsewhere, especially people killed fighting a war.)

Ken and his dad approached the monument to fallen soldiers of a past war. As they entered the building, Ken noticed some of the people were reading the various plaques of information on those who had given their lives for their

country. It was quiet, the marble floor echoing the whispered voices and footsteps of those who walked about. The temperature was noticeably cooler than the warm outside and it added to the eerie quietness, making the place seem a little bit creepy in Ken's opinion.

Ken approached one of the statues. He looked at the rifles with fixed bayonets in the bronze soldiers' hands. Ken had been fascinated for as long as he could remember with war and fighting and soldiers and all their gear. This fascination quickly receded into the background as he stood mesmerized by the unseeing eyes of the silent soldiers that stared out into the distance; eyes that conveyed such deep emotions that Ken was surprised at how realistic they looked.

This was not as Ken had expected. Somehow he thought he would see an excitement there. After all, these were soldiers with rifles, fighters, and defenders of freedom. Of course, they were just a group of men depicted in bronze, but... .

Ken couldn't explain what he was feeling, but he knew that those eyes had captured his attention unlike anything had before. He felt his dad walk up behind him and place his hands on his shoulders, but Ken was in another world and he could not and did not want to break away from it yet. He felt very deep emotions inside of him as he gazed at each of the faces. There were rugged faces of older men. These seemed to speak of bravery, but also of hopelessness and resignation, and like they had seen horrors that no man should have ever seen. And then there were the faces of younger men, maybe 18 or so Ken figured. Some were sad, one looked frightened, none looked happy. It almost seemed to Ken that he could hear the words of one of the young men. Something like, "Was I born into this world just to die in this hell?"

Unexpectedly, Ken's eyes filled with tears. They weren't like tears he had cried as a kid when he had been hurt or felt sorry for himself. These were tears of sorrow for someone else. These were tears from a heart that ached because it felt another's pain.

Ken finally pulled his gaze away and looked over his shoulder at his dad. Somehow there weren't the words to say that could express what Ken was going through, and his father wisely said nothing in return.

His father recalled how many years ago he had also stared into those faces, and he remembered the profound effect it had had on him. It was one of those defining moments that had caused him to want to devote his life to peace, and eventually to the Prince of Peace. Now, on this trip home to see Ken's grandparents he had wanted to take the opportunity to visit the cenotaph with Ken, so that he too could experience the same. In silence, Ken and his dad gazed at the statues for a little while longer and then turned and walked away.

Key Promise: The keys are weapons to bring life. They can blast your spiritual enemies far from you and can stop their devilish deeds, but they are primarily to help you bring life to the lost.

Change Your World

(Song being sung in the spirit:)

*Last night I had the strangest dream
I ever dreamed before.
I dreamed the world had all agreed
To put an end to war.*

I dreamed I saw a mighty room

*And the room was filled with men,
And the papers they were signing said
They'd never fight again.*

*And when the papers all were signed
And a million copies made;
They all joined hands and bowed their heads,
And grateful prayers were prayed.*

*And the people in the streets below,
Were dancing 'round and 'round.
And the guns and swords and uniforms,
Were scattered on the ground.*

*Last night I had the strangest dream
I ever dreamed before.
I dreamed the world had all agreed
To put an end to war.*

(Eliska, departed 8-year-old victim of war in Sarajevo:) That's my dream. I dream the world will agree to put an end to war. There is a way, but I need your help. Yes, you.--The Family youth. Did you realize that you're all having to put away some of the things you're used to doing so that you can help put an end to the wars of this world? It's hard to imagine, I know. How could foregoing time playing your computer games or watching movies put an end to war? Well, you tell me. I'd like you to tell me how they would help you personally put an end to all the wars of the world.

How can being more loving to your brothers and sisters put an end to war? How can being more willing to do what you're asked put an end to war? How can witnessing put an end to war? How can reading the Word put an end to war? How can sharing your possessions put an end to war? How can not being bossy and pushy put an end to war? How can not being argumentative put an end to war?

How can the world put an end to war? It all starts with you, with your heart. One changed heart. Your changed heart. You can change the world. Start out with changing yourself, and pretty soon your changed life is going to influence someone else and help change their heart. And on and on it will go until when Jesus returns there are going to be a lot of changed hearts.

Even though it might look to some people like the end when Jesus returns, really it'll only be the beginning. That's when you're going to be used by Jesus more than ever before to help Him set up His Kingdom of love, peace, and harmony. All the things you're learning now are the things you'll be teaching others in the Millennium, and it's going to be exciting! You'll have superpowers, and be "supermen" and "superwomen." You'll be so thankful you were willing to do whatever it takes now, although difficult, in order to be the rulers of tomorrow.

If you grow weary during this time of renewal, remember these words I've spoken. I've been given them to share with you so that you will keep the vision of what this time is all about. It's about preparing for the future. Your future. It's spiritual survival preparation that will not only save your spirit, but will save your life some day. I love you. Please don't give up. Keep fighting!

Key Promise: You can change your heart when you call on the keys and then obey what the Lord tells you to do.

Personal Goal for the week/P&P question: Ask the Lord for one area you want to move forward in this week and what to do and how to go about it. At the end of the week, ask Him how you did and what you should do next. Share your progress and lessons with your classmates, teachers, parents, and peers. Ask for their input.

Cookie Day

Jan looked at the kitchen longingly. It had been a while since she had been able to get together with her friends for a baking project, where they used to play their favorite music and chat and just hang out.

It's not that she couldn't see her friends anymore, but the music they liked wasn't always Family music. Without that freedom to do what they wanted, most of her friends didn't like to come around much anymore, as they felt their personal freedoms were a bit cramped. *It isn't as comfortable as it used to be*, Jan thought.

Her mother passed by into the kitchen carrying a small tray of fruit. "Jan, I left the baby in her crib for a moment. Can you help me cut up some of this fruit for a fruit salad? Thanks so much!"

Jan begrudgingly made her way to the kitchen. Noticing Jan's sour expression, her mom touched her on the cheek and made her way back to the bedroom to take care of the baby. Returning half a moment later with the baby on her hip, she asked Jan, "Did something I say make you feel bad?"

"No, Mum, I'm fine," Jan said, not wanting to open up about what was on her heart. Taking a moment to pause, Jan's mother thought out loud, "Isn't today your baking day? Where are the rest of your friends?"

"We decided not to bake today, that's all," said Jan, again trying to drop the subject.

"I see," Jan's mom said. "Does the renewal have something to do with that?" she said, probing a bit more.

"Well ... " Jan said.

Jan's mom looked lovingly at her and said, "Well, if you don't mind, I can tell you something that the Lord told me about the things I'm missing during the renewal time."

Jan didn't answer, and her mom went on.

"Did you ever see children with leg braces? Some children have to wear them for a while, until their legs are strengthened. They are uncomfortable, and unpleasant, but they allow the child to exercise his or her legs as they give support to a weak limb. In the same way, the renewal is like going through something that seems unpleasant at first, but that will result in greater strengthening in the long run.

"The leg braces don't feel very good. They're uncomfortable at best and even painful at times. Sometimes we may think the same way about the renewal, because we feel bound by the things we 'can't' do. But if we look instead at the beautiful promises the Lord's given, and trust that it's only for a time, then we'll grow and mature and be strengthened like the Lord wants us to."

"Yes, but we're not going to go back to the way things were. It's not like we can listen to our own music and bake cookies like we did before, when the renewal is over," Jan lamented.

"Well, things won't be exactly like they were before, but I'm sure you and your friends will appreciate the deeper spirit you'll have, or maybe you'll end up having more exciting conversations than you did before. The Lord never takes something away without giving you something better. That's a promise from the Lord, and He said that during this time we have to hold Him to some of those promises, and really claim the good things we want to see come about after this renewal," Jan's mom replied reassuringly.

"But why do we have to be renewed? Why couldn't things stay the same as they were before?" Jan questioned.

"Jan, do you remember when Daddy passed on?" She said, with a little tear forming in her eyes. "Maybe it wasn't what we wanted to happen right then—and it certainly wasn't what was going to make us the most comfortable and at ease. But the Lord allows things like Daddy's passing because He knows what the fruit of these things will bring.—And look at you already, for example. You've taken on so much responsibility with the children. That in itself may not feel as 'comfortable' as you'd like it to be either, but when I look at you, you stand head and shoulders over lots of people your age, because you're used to responsibility, and you're committed to taking charge and doing the best you can do. Most people don't learn these things till they're much older, if even at all.

"You see, that's one of the gifts you've been given—although it didn't come in super pretty packaging. But you see, if we had our way and we didn't allow ourselves to go through the breakings the Lord has for us and the shaping He allows, then we'd end up missing out on the hidden strengths He wants us to gain. It's not that we'll skip out on the tests and trials—those have to come, whether by our will or not. But He sends the mini-tests and trials to get us strengthened for the bigger ones."

Jan thought, *I know this talk. I've heard it a thousand times.*

As she saw her daughter was silent and still seemed troubled, Jan's mom said, "Well, maybe it's time you made your own decisions. I've tried to help, but I can only counsel you now. You have to decide, and you have to act on the decisions you make in your own life."

With a kiss, Jan's mother left the kitchen. Staring at the empty cookie trays, Jan thought about her missing friends again, and looked at the calendar to note how many days were left of the renewal.

Oh well, couldn't hurt to make the best of it. If what my mum says is true, I suppose I'd like to get something out of this renewal. Couldn't hurt to try.

And try she did.

The next "cookie day," she invited her friends over. Most were a little hesitant, as they felt the same way Jan did—that it wouldn't be the same. But

Jan asked them to come, as she had something new to try. Every week, one person would be in the spotlight, and they'd ask them questions about their life, their likes/dislikes. She even got a few to tell funny stories about their lives before they knew each other. It started out a bit awkward, but after they had done it a few times, they could each look forward to getting to know each other a bit more.

And the cookies they made—they definitely improved. Before, it was a matter of making cookies so they'd have an excuse for being in the same kitchen together. Now they baked cookies and even *invented* recipes. Each took a turn to come with one idea they'd like to try, and if it was a good idea, they would name it after themselves. They gave the cookies to friends, neighbors, visitors—and when recipes didn't work out, well, those were enjoyed by their hungry little brothers.

When the renewal ended, things didn't go back to the way they had before, but each girl felt more mature, and Jan began to see a bit more clearly what life was about. By hearing stories from the other girls she knew, she saw how each had their set of challenges and experiences—and how it built their character and depth of spirit. And by talking together, they built a rapport that left them with a special bond—even their mothers referred to them as the "Cookie Society."

After cleaning up at the end of one cookie episode, Jan thought back to how things had been going. *Well, maybe there isn't a definite "happily ever after" feeling inside, but there is a big hint that it is possible. After all, I've leaped one hurdle and proved that it is possible to find other ways to have fun. And who knows what's around the corner?*

Key promise: The keys of yieldedness and acceptance can help you to step out and try going My way all out. You will be happy with the results, and never want to go back to your old ways.

Defeat in Nottingham

Cling, clang, cling! The sound of dueling swords filled the stone courtyard. Robin Hood and his merry men had stormed the castle and overpowered the guards of the vile Sheriff of Nottingham. Now, left alone, the Sheriff himself was on the run from Robin's blade. Robin was the superior swordsman and the Sheriff was close to his end. Up the stairs they dueled, trading blows and parries, out the gate, and into the courtyard where the merry men were just rounding up the last of the evil guards.

The crowd watched in anticipation as their long awaited moment of freedom drew nigh. Robin Hood would save them from the Sheriff's tyranny with a thrust of his sword, sending the Sheriff of Nottingham, who had long oppressed them, to his well-deserved grave. At least, that's what Robin was thinking.

Eager to free his people from cruelty and injustice, Robin Hood pressed forward on the attack. With a clever strike he disarmed the Sheriff and knocked him to the ground. He placed his foot on the wicked Sheriff's chest and raised his sword high for the finishing blow. One more second and the kingdom would be free...

"Hey, wait there, you!" a loud voice sounded. Robin looked around to see that a man had stepped forward from the crowd. "Don't go hurtin' our good Sheriff like that. Let him up, you scoundrel." Robin couldn't believe his ears. Wasn't this the same Sheriff of Nottingham that had for years burned their farms, hung men for petty crimes, filled his prisons with the poor, and oppressed these people in many ways too cruel to name? Why this change?

"Yes, let him up," agreed a peasant woman from the crowd. "It's not like he's all bad. Mind you, he threw my sons in the workhouse because I couldn't pay my rent, and stole our only cow, but I'm sure he must have needed it, else he wouldn't have taken it."

"That's right!" said another. "He may have hung my poor father in the town square for stealing ale, but nice man as he was he let the old man have one last sip before he died. Don't see as I should hold a grudge for that, do you?"

Robin was astonished. "Hanging a man for stealing ale? If it wasn't for the dastardly Sheriff and his damned ale to begin with there wouldn't be so many drunkards that felt the need to steal for it. Or if they needed it that badly, they'd have some money to buy it were it not for his unreasonable taxes. Why would you want me to let this man live?"

The townspeople began to respond:

"You're the one we don't like around here. Get out of here, why don't you, and leave us with our Sheriff."

"Yes, long live the Sheriff! Long live the Sheriff and his ale!"

"We don't care about all that other stuff he's done, we love his ale, now give us back our Sheriff!"

"He can burn our lands, imprison our sons, and kill our fathers, but we know he's a good man deep down."

"Long live the Sheriff! Long live the Sheriff! Long live the Sheriff!"

From his vantage point on the ground, the Sheriff of Nottingham began to smile. He knew that the crowd was his. No matter how he oppressed them, they would still be loyal to him because they loved the ale that his men brewed. Close to all the town was addicted to it, and they wouldn't have it any other way. He sneered at Robin Hood, who only stood there with an expression of complete unbelief on his face.

Robin Hood stepped backwards and slowly sheathed his sword. The Sheriff stood up and raised his arms in a signal of victory. "Ale for all tonight!" he proclaimed. The shouts of, "Long live the Sheriff" and "God save the Sheriff" only grew louder. Slinging his bow over his shoulder, Robin Hood mounted his horse, and signaling to his men, rode silently into the forest never to be seen again.

That night the Sheriff celebrated his reinstatement by raising taxes, burning four farms, stealing 500 head of livestock, and hanging two men. The townsfolk didn't seem to care much. They had their ale, and to them it was all that mattered.

Key Promise: When you make the right choices, the power of the keys will defeat any adversaries that oppress you. My key-empowered spirit helpers can liberate you from any enemy.

Gridlocked!

"Oh, man! Why aren't we moving?" Gwen said, frustrated, as she leaned out the side window from the rider's seat. She craned her neck out into the smog of Mexico City's highway traffic, trying to see what was causing the traffic jam. Their van had been at a complete stop for five minutes, and they were running late.

"I think there's some kind of roadwork being done further down the road," replied SGA Manny, who was driving. "Or maybe there was an accident. Lord help me, I should've prayed about the route. We were in such a hurry to leave so we could make it to the barbeque on time, I kind of missed that step."

Loud sighs and moans could be heard all through the back of the van, which was filled with seven eager JETTs and Junior Teens on their way to an area afternoon barbeque. They were a few months into the renewal period, and had been really looking forward to this particular outing for quite awhile now, as it was being held especially for the JETTs and Juniors in their city.

"Jesus, please clear up the traffic *now!*" a teen in the back of the van prayed rather emphatically, and then continued, "We claim the keys that we can make it to the park on time!"

Someone else piped up with, "And rebuke those construction workers for causing this jam, or those people who had an accident. ..." and he trailed off with an embarrassed smile, realizing what he was saying. Everyone laughed a little at that, including Manny.

Manny turned around from his seat and said, "Well, I guess this is one of those times that we almost need to ask the Lord *what* we should be praying for. The keys will only do what's within the Lord's will, so we may as well not waste time and energy trying to get the Lord's will to conform to our own. Should we take a minute to hear from Him and see if He has any direction for us?"

Everyone nodded in agreement. Even though this whole ordeal was pretty disappointing, they had all been learning big lessons these days on putting the Lord first, sacrificing in love for others, and just generally submitting to His will and plan.

After they had prayed, they received a few Words from the Lord: "Wait on Me, and be patient. I won't take something away without giving you something better. Count your blessings and praise Me when you're feeling down, and I will help to point out the blessings that are around you, and will help you to have fun in any circumstance that you're in."

First they all took some praise time and counted their blessings for a few minutes, and then Manny suggested they play a game. They started off with a "Spirit Helpers Nemesis" game that they had recently thought of:

Gwen started out with, "Apotheon."

"Arcothon," Manny replied, and then called out "Baal."

It was quiet for a few seconds till someone else shouted "Archer! Okay next is, Candomble."

"Salvador." And it went on like that for a few minutes, till they couldn't think of any more.

The traffic started inching forward slowly, so Manny turned and focused his concentration on the road. The JETTs and teens continued playing various games in the back for about an hour more, as they crawled slowly across the city.

As their van came to a turnoff, Manny took it, since it didn't seem that the traffic was going to ease up any time soon. "Well, guys, we're already over an hour late, and we're still only halfway there, so by the time we get there, it's going to pretty much be over." Manny pulled to a stop outside of a little restaurant that was by the side of the highway. "What do you say we try to provision some dinner here, or do you guys still want to try to get to the barbeque?"

"Why don't we ask the Lord about it?" responded one of the JETTs.

So after hearing from the Lord, Who said that it wouldn't be worth the time and gas money to continue all the way across town, they decided to try provisioning at the restaurant.

* * *

"That turned out to be a fun outing in itself," Gwen said, as they were pulling into their driveway later that evening.

They had provisioned a scrumptious meal, and spent quite awhile witnessing to the owner of the restaurant, who got saved and hooked up with *Conéctate*.

"It sure was," Manny responded, "and the manager was such a sheep. I think the Lord really engineered it so we would meet him."

As they opened the front door to the Home, FGA Marie was there with a worried look on her face. "I tried to catch you guys on your way out this afternoon, because we received a last-minute phone call from Mark at the Lakeside Home. He was the one organizing the whole get-together, you know. Anyhow, he said it was being postponed. I feel so bad that you guys went all the way there."

"No worries, Marie!" Manny reassured her. "We were delayed in traffic and never actually made it there. So it must've been the Lord. We ended up provisioning a nice meal out, got in some witnessing, and had a fun time in the van. So it was a real Romans 8:28 type situation."

"Well, that's good to hear!" Marie responded with a smile. "The reason it was postponed was that apparently a few folks in different Homes came down with some kind of tummy bug today, and the Lord said it would be better to play it safe."

All of the team, who had piled in the door by now, smiled to each other in amazement. Gwen said, "Boy, it was definitely the Lord then, that we didn't go

all the way there! That would have been an even bigger bummer after driving so far."

"The good news," Marie continued, "is that the barbeque is on for next week, Lord willing, and if the sickness is over by then. On top of that, one of the other Homes has volunteered to host a dance at their place afterward! So it looks like it'll be worth the wait."

"Thank the Lord for His timing!" exclaimed Gwen to Manny as they walked up the stairs to their rooms.

"Hey, and isn't that big road team of teens coming through here next weekend?" Manny said. "I guess it means they'll get to go to the barbeque and dance too. AND ... " he added with exaggerated emphasis as he nudged her in the arm, "I heard they're mostly teen guys!"

"Whatever!" Gwen laughed and blushed, as she nudged him back.

Key promise: When disappointment sets in, call on the keys of trust and faith, and I will deliver to you a positive outlook that will enable you to see things the way I see them, and will help you to make the most of whatever situation you find yourself in.

He Knew He Shouldn't

"Stop!" signaled the raincoat-clad policeman, as he hailed the speeding car.

This is not my day, thought Jackie, as her car screeched to a halt. First the rain, then the consequent traffic. But if I play my cards well, I just might get myself out of this one. I've done it before, and so has my friend, Jane. She always gets away with things, she thought, as she sheepishly handed her papers to the officer.

This was not the first time she had been caught speeding, but every other time Jackie had somehow been able to weasel out of that ticket. First her excuse had been that the speedometer wasn't working, then she had blamed the other cars for quickening the pace, but this time around she had no excuse. Her thoughts were interrupted by the officer's deep voice.

"Did you hear about the new regulations regarding speeding?"

"Yes, I did. But no one got hurt this time, so can't you just spare me the ticket? I'm sorry, you know." She pleaded, wearing her most innocent smile.

"That won't work this time, missy," replied the policeman. "You see, the Force gave all you drivers time to learn the regulations. We've posted the guidelines and broadcast warnings on the radio all day, and now with the rainy season coming and the resulting mud slides and wet roads, we have to enforce these rules or the safety of this whole community will be endangered, not to mention your own safety."

I can't believe it! she thought. *He's writing a ticket? That is so not fair! I never imagined they would actually enforce that law when, warnings were all they gave before.* She drove off in a huff, though careful not to pick up too much speed, for fear of bringing upon herself a repetition of her recent woes.

Several moments later, she was startled, after rounding a curve further down the road, to see something that looked like a mess of rubble. She saw that it was a vehicle overturned, most likely after skidding on the concrete wet from this morning's shower.

Jackie slowed down to take a better look, and could hear the firemen and paramedics calling to each other: "Find survivors;" "Try CPR on this one;" "Warn any vehicles coming this way." The last thing she heard as she started up again was the dejected statement, "Looks like he was going way too fast."

It hit her like a ton of bricks! The driver probably didn't think it was a big deal and was sure he would get away with it.

Thank You, Lord, for not letting that happen to me, she thought out loud, as she reminisced on her encounter with the uniformed man.

Key promise: The key of obedience will give you the conviction and strength to follow My Word explicitly. Call on the keys and you will see the effects of your obedience.

Joey's Discovery

Bob and Joey were out riding bikes. Bob (an FGA) normally went biking with SGA Dave, but today he had decided to ask Joey if he'd like to come along. Joey had been struggling with the renewal period, which had pretty much put a stop to most of the things that he did with his free time, things that he wanted to do. He knew the adults were making an effort to take time with the younger people in the Family, to be a sample of what the Family truly is, a revolutionary life that was his heritage, but Joey felt a bit rebellious toward it all.

Joey knew he should at least receive what others were trying to do for him, so when Bob came along and asked him to go for a bike ride, Joey figured he would go ahead and do it, as he had nothing else to do right then. He liked Bob anyway, and for an FGA, he wasn't so bad.

As Bob and he were riding along, Bob asked, "So, what's been happening with you these days?"

Joey muttered, "Not much," not wanting to tell him what he really was thinking.

"Do you like taking bike rides like this?" Bob said.

"Yeah, for sure," Joey responded right away. "It gives me something to do that I like."

"Do you like flying kites?" Bob asked.

"Well, sort of. Maybe. I don't really know, because I've never really done it much," Joey replied.

"Dave is really good at making and flying kites. He was super into it when he was younger. I bet if you ask him he'd show you how, and take you out," said Bob.

"Hmm ... I don't know," Joey answered.

Joey's inward thoughts were that he shouldn't have to go out of his way to go ask Dave, whom he hardly ever talked to, about flying kites. Plus, what if Dave didn't like the idea and didn't want to be bothered with Joey?

Close by was a Selvegion "elf" who quickly saw an opportunity to play on Joey's worries. He whispered to Joey, *And since all these other fun things you like to do were "taken away," shouldn't all these SGAs and FGAs be coming to you, instead of you having to go to them?*

As if he were reading his mind, Bob suddenly said, "I know it's not easy for you, Joey. The Enemy can make it seem like all the things you like to do have been taken away, so why should you make an effort to do anything about it?"

Joey responded, "Well, it is kind of like that, Bob."

Bob answered, "Joey, the Family is willingly forsaking these activities that have borne bad fruit in our lives because we all realize that as much as we may like some of these things, they are not good for our spirits, not in the quantity of attention we've been giving them. We're not here to live to do only things for entertainment. We're here to be soldiers in the Lord's Endtime Army. That's why all of us, adults and young people, can benefit from this time of renewal. Computer games, movie watching, Internet surfing, and all the rest that we've been spending too much time doing aren't what we, the Family, are about.

"I think it's tougher for you than me because I know these truths from experience, whereas you're having to grow in faith by believing without necessarily seeing that this renewal time is for the best. But hang in there, buddy. I know if you pray, the Lord will open your understanding and speak to your heart and show you that if you want to serve the Lord, then this renewal is going to be a major step in the right direction."

Joey thought about what Bob said and decided he'd ask Dave about the kite-flying idea. Joey wasn't a quitter.

In his heart, Joey really loved the Lord. He remembered the GN with the picture of the boy who challenged the Lord to change his life for the better and how the Lord accepted the challenge. Joey whispered to the Lord, "I challenge You to help me enjoy this renewal and change me for the better!" What Joey didn't see were his spirit helpers and guardians angels praising the Lord for this step of faith.

The words that the Lord said on the GN cover to the boy in the picture came to Joey's mind, "Okay, you're on!" He thought he was just remembering them, but had he been able to see into the spirit world at that moment, he would have known that wasn't the case.

A few days later, Joey unexpectedly ended up sitting next to Dave at the dinner table. Joey felt a bit awkward, not knowing how to approach Dave about the kite-flying idea. He finally blurted out to Dave, "I heard you used to be into kites, and was wondering if you might ever have time to show me how to make one? We could see if it flies."

Dave was surprised at Joey's idea. He had always enjoyed making kites and flying them when he was younger. It had been a bit of a hobby with him and he had always found it to be great fun.

"Sure," Dave replied smiling, "it used to be a hobby for me when I was around your age. I enjoy making things. Little did I know that that joy of making stuff would end up in my present ministry of doing handyman work. Who knows, Joey? You might end up finding a calling during this renewal."

Joey was excited and happy that he had overcome his nervousness and talked to Dave about his idea. Here he was, committed to doing something totally different with someone whom he generally never interacted with. It was new and exciting and had a kind of thrill of its own that Joey wasn't used to. He was eager to get started.

The final day of finishing their homemade kite came and it was time to take it for a test flight at the local park. There wasn't a lot of wind, and the kite didn't fly that spectacularly, but Dave and Joey had a great time trying to get it to go, with lots of laughs at all the funny things that happened. There was the time when the kite dive-bombed, and they thought it was the end of their hard labor at designing and assembling their unique flying apparatus.

Dave had a great time showing Joey how to maneuver the string so that it would catch the wind. At one point the kite flew majestically, high above the trees, as Dave and Joey proudly looked upon their kite with the design of the Family symbol flying so high for all to see. Dave felt like a kid again, and he began to think about what else he might be able to do with Joey and some of the other kids in the Home.

Joey also began looking around to see who else in the Home might have some hidden talent or secret hobby that they might be able to teach or share with him. He didn't have to look far. He soon found out that pretty much everyone had something that they were happy to share. The Lord blessed his step of faith in reaching out to others. Joey saw that there was a lot more to people than he thought. He also realized that there was a lot more to do than he thought.

It was a neat experience to see people in his Home, younger and older, making an effort to get to know each other and be a blessing to one another. This was something that was not so evident before the renewal. So that was a definite plus in his life.

As he sat down to eat his dinner one night and looked at the brethren around him, Joey remembered a verse his shepherd had shared in devotions a few days earlier: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have

love one to another" (John 13:35). Joey was encouraged and admitted to himself that being in the Family was pretty good after all.

Verse: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you (Mat.7:7).

Key promise: The keys of discovery will open to you whole new realms you never even knew existed. All it takes is a willingness to step out and try, and they will take it from there, and help turn you on to your new, improved lifestyle.

The Journey of the Pebbles

Two teenagers set out on a six-month journey. It was a challenge that they had taken up, to trek through some rough terrain, giving up many of their regular comforts and luxuries. There was a promise of certain rewards and gains at the end of the journey, rare treasures not to be found in the regular routines.

So they set out—over mountains and through valleys, encountering rocky terrain and lush greenery alike.

One of the first things they noticed on their separate journeys was the presence of little pebbles along the path. There was nothing extraordinary-looking about these pebbles, and indeed the youths had encountered much prettier rocks in past journeys, which they had willingly collected despite the burdens those pretty rocks had become.

Now on this journey, starting out devoid of all their pretty rock collections, and with empty knapsacks, each one pondered whether to pick up these pebbles and carry them. Other times they wouldn't have even bothered. They certainly knew that prettier and more appealing rocks existed, and the only reason they even considered these pebbles now was that each one had a little message painted on the surface: "Pick me up!"

So the youths picked up the pebbles whenever they found them, and added them to their knapsacks.

At the end of the week, sitting around a campfire, the first youth studied his newly acquired collection and began to wonder why he was taking the trouble to carry these pebbles along. They looked so very ordinary, so dull and lifeless compared to the sparkling treasures he'd collected before.

The second youth also studied his own collection, and rather than reminiscing about the beloved rock collections he'd had to leave behind on this journey, he remembered some of the instructions he'd received when first setting out, to do with picking up and collecting new things, even if they didn't seem appealing at first. He pondered whether some of the rewards at the end of the journey might be tied to these pebbles. So even though it went against his natural impulses, he carefully put each one back into his knapsack.

The next weeks and months of the journey, the first youth found it all too

easy to reject many of the pebbles on his pathway, and even those he did reluctantly pick up, he often discarded later, preferring a light and almost empty knapsack to one filled with the unattractive objects.

The second youth didn't find the pebbles any more attractive, but he figured that since none seemed more special than the other, he had better go ahead and collect them all, and not leave any behind, even if it was making his travel load more work to carry.

Finally they came to the end of their respective journeys. The first youth unpacked his knapsack, which didn't take long as it didn't contain much. He tossed the few pebbles he'd collected into a corner and eagerly ran to his former rock collections, to admire and dust them off.

The second youth carefully unpacked his knapsack. The collecting of the pebbles had remained somewhat of a mystery the entire journey, but now as he carefully laid them out on shelves, he noticed a change coming over them. They began to take on a special glow and transform before his very eyes into scintillating jewels of inestimable value. He marveled at the unique beauty and perfect craftsmanship of each one, and rejoiced in his newfound treasure.

(Jesus:) This is an analogy of the renewal. I'll be asking you to collect new things—new habits and mindsets and ideas—and to invest time in new priorities, things like fellowship with your Home team, tuning into the children more, talking about the things of the Word, being open to learning new things with others, or teaching others things you know.

All of these renewal requirements and recommendations are like those plain-colored pebbles. You might not really see the point, and unless you trust Me that the journey has a wonderful ending, you might be tempted to throw away some of what I'm asking you to collect on your journey.

Yes, those new things and habits and priorities will be work to carry on your journey, because they'll take your time and they'll take effort; sometimes they'll take humility and stepping out to do something you're not used to. But I promise that if you faithfully collect all that I have for you on this renewal journey, that you will see the treasures of what you have gained at the end.

Your old rock collections—like old habits and pastimes and priorities—won't have that same pull on you, or be that same weight in your life, but you will have a new collection to replace the old, a collection that will give you power and new life and beauty and joy. *(End of message.)*

Key Promise: The keys can be the rose-colored glasses that you need to see My moves and My ways in a positive and faith-filled light, and to take the glitter out of your old ways and mindsets and habits.

Jungle Adventure!

Jesse and Kate lived in Brazil. A couple of SGAs in their Home had taken them on a road trip to some of the towns near the Amazon River in an attempt to make the renewal period exciting, fun, and different. Kate knew the previous time of punishment had brought about a lot of good changes, and had even made her happier in the long run, but she was still struggling with forsaking movies again. Part of her wished good changes could come about in easier ways.

For their free day they'd been offered a ride on a *pirogue** up part of the coast of the Amazon River. There were small huts on the riverbanks on one side, and some of the villagers, who lived a primitive lifestyle, waved to them as they puttered by, the motor of their boat slicing through the ominous shiny black still waters. *How odd to see water so dark*, thought Jesse. They were told that the color of the water was due to the bottom of the river being black. (*Pirogue: a canoe made from one log, sometimes elaborately designed.)

Their guide had invited them to take a swim, but they all thought the better of it, knowing that there were anacondas* in the area, not to mention a host of other creatures you wouldn't want to mess with in these dark waters. Not only that, this part of the jungle was about as primitive as they come. No electricity, no plumbing or piped in water, just little huts and families living away from civilization. (*anaconda: a South American non-venomous snake, the largest in the boa family, that lives in or near water and in trees. It can grow to a length of more than 9 m/30 ft.)

As Kate looked at her surroundings she thought, *Wow, We're forsaking movies, computer games and System music, but they not only don't have VCRs, computers, or TVs, they don't even have a bathroom or running water!*

Their guide offered to drop them off at the banks to do a bit of exploring. Jesse mentioned how beautiful the trees were--tall, thick, and lush green. All Kate noticed were the huge ants. They must have been at least an inch long! *Why did I wear my sandals?* she thought. Amy, the SGA who had accompanied them, had suggested she wear her tennis shoes, but Kate had blown off her suggestion and not bothered to ask the Lord about it. *Obviously it was hot, and hot means wear your sandals*, she had thought. Kate's spirit helper, Director, just sighed. *I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen.*

Then the unforeseen happened and they got caught in a torrential downpour. They all scrambled for shelter and one of the villagers offered his residence as a place of refuge for them.

What poverty! thought Jesse upon entering their hut. What impressed him, though, was the thoughtfulness of the couple who had taken them in from the rain, and their humility. They were offered a cup of warm tea and some fruit as they waited for the rain to stop.

Amy explained they were missionaries, their guide translating for her. The couple pointing to Kate and Jesse remarked how remarkable it was to see such young people dedicating their lives to God. Amy began to witness to them and the couple ended up praying to receive the Lord, along with the guide. Kate looked out from the hut; the rained had stopped.

As they returned to their boat to travel back from their free-day excursion, Amy said, "Imagine if this was the lifestyle we had to live to serve the Lord! Makes what we're forsaking take on a whole new perspective. I'm a lot more thankful for all we do have, and that the Lord is bringing us back to the basics of what we're here for. Just think, it's only been in the past one hundred years or so that most of the modern conveniences we have today were invented. Can you imagine what it was like for the missionaries back then?"

Jesse and Kate thought about it, and as they did, life during this renewal period took on a whole new light, and their service to the Lord took on a whole new beginning.

Key promise: You can yield. You can change. You can see things through My eyes and be like Me. Call on the keys of yieldedness, change, and My thoughts, and I will do the miracle in your heart.

Kicking the Habit

Tiffany and Vivian were best friends. They had been in the same Home for three years, and now with the renewal beginning, both wondered how the changes would affect them. They had some obvious bad habits that they were both facing the challenge of changing. One of those was listening to System music.

The renewal had begun, and System music was no more, not allowed, not to be listened to. They had turned in their System CDs, mpeg files were erased from the Home's computer and individual players, and Internet browsing was off limits. They were on their honor while out witnessing to keep themselves in check.

* * *

"Girls, I need to pick up the rice cooker that is on sale for the Home. It's in the household department on the third floor," Viv's mom explained to Viv and Tiffany, after they'd wrapped up their witnessing.

"Mom, I need to go to the bathroom, so can we meet you when we're done?"

"Okay, sweetheart," replied Viv's mom, and headed for the escalator to make her purchase.

"Viv, *what* are you doing?" exclaimed Tif, as she was affectionately called by her friends.

"Listen, Tif, come here!" Viv whispered loudly to her. This is the floor where they have the latest CDs, and you can listen to them before buying them. Let's go and check them out!" she urged, as she gave Tif a push in the direction of the music section.

"I thought you had to go to the *bathroom*, Viv!" giggled Tif.

"Well, *hello*, Tif. You think I was gonna tell Mom we were gonna listen to System music during the renewal period, and we'd be right up to join her?!" retorted Viv.

"This is against the rules! We're gonna get it if we get caught!" Tif argued.

"*If* is a very big word," mimicked Viv in Bunny Big Word style.

Both girls laughed and headed to check out the latest music.

They headed straight for their favorite section, and Viv put on the headphones and began to listen. After a few minutes, Tif tugged on her shirtsleeve, "Viv, let me listen!"

"Go get your own set of headphones, girl!" Viv ordered, as she knocked her hand down.

Both girls looked at each other, and Viv knew she shouldn't have been so snotty. Tif looked down and walked on to find another headset, but knew they needed to get upstairs soon, or Viv's mother would begin to wonder what happened to them. *What was Viv's problem, anyhow?* thought Tif.

Tif started listening to a song from the latest rock CD, when Viv came up and grabbed her arm. "We gotta go, girl. Mom is probably beginning to wonder what happened to us."

"Okay, okay," replied Tif, who was growing tired of Viv being so bossy.

"What's wrong, Tif?" Viv questioned.

"Well, Viv, you don't need to be so bossy," Tif pouted.

"Oh, Tif, you're so touchy! Now, let's get going, and remember, this little incident is between you and me." Viv reminded her, as they headed for the escalator.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm not going to be telling anybody," Tif retorted.

Both of the girls hurried up the stairs of the escalator to make up time, hoping that Viv's mom wouldn't be suspicious of their overdue arrival.

"Hi, Mom!" Viv said smiling, as she hugged her mom.

"Hi, honey, I was beginning to wonder what happened to you!"

"Sorry, Mom. How's it going?" Viv replied back.

"Just fine. Thank the Lord, I was able to get the rice cooker and we can head home now," Viv's mom said.

The three headed back home from their day of witnessing, Tif and Viv keeping their little secret to themselves, happy that Viv's mom hadn't questioned them further.

* * *

It was devotions for the JETTs and junior teens, and the reading material for the Home was a study the shepherd had put together on System music. The

Home had decided to go through each of the specific areas that the Family was forsaking during the renewal period and do a Word study on it.

After praying, Tom, the Home shepherd, began, "Well, I thought it would be helpful if we all had an understanding of why System music isn't good for our spirits and what kind of fruit it bears. Here's the first excerpt I have to read that I found very interesting, as it was written ten years ago and is from the Letter, "Getting Back on Track." This section is called "The Curse of Excessive System Music."

Tom went on to read, and as Tif and Viv listened, they knew what he was saying was true, for they had felt these same things in their spirits. Then Tom read another excerpt from the Letter explaining that everyone, including the adults, had fasted System music for six months. Viv and Tif were surprised to hear that that had happened so long ago, as in 1994 they were just five years old.

As Viv sat there listening, part of the Letter spoke to her heart as if someone was reading her mind. Tom read:

Or as another teen put it, "I feel like every bit of faith in me has been ripped out of me, and as much as I want it back, I just can't seem to find it!"

So let me ask you something: Who or what do you think is ripping that faith out of you? Sure you'd probably like to blame it on your parents or your shepherds or the negative peer pressure or some bad experiences you've had—but actually, it's the Enemy who is stealing away your faith, through those very words you listen to for "comfort" or "inspiration." The Devil, through that System music, is destroying your faith! As Grandpa has taught us, "Words are real things! They bless or they curse; they lift up or they knock down; they save or they damn! There's no in-between!"

You could compare it to being in a battle—like a boxing match. Your opponent is really beating up on you and hurting you.—He's kicking you in the stomach, and jabbing you in the ribs, and punching you in the face. But somehow, all this danger and the threat is so camouflaged under the cover of "variety" and "a great beat" and "a good message" that you actually begin to think it's inspiring! You don't even realize you're taking a beating, until he's finally weakened you so much that he clobbers you with the KO punch—that knock-out punch—and all of a sudden you're out of the fight!

If you have developed some kind of evil fascination for the System music you've been listening to, you can be cleansed of it!—And you need to be cleansed of it, because it makes God sad, Who loves you so much and cares about you, to see that you're caught in this grip of a fascination for this evil music, because you have yielded to it, knowing that it was wrong. Or maybe you didn't have conviction yourself that it was wrong, but in many cases you at least knew that your adult shepherds disapproved of it. But for whatever reason you may have gained an interest in it and even a fascination for it, this doesn't

mean that there's no hope for you and that you don't love the Lord. But it does mean you don't love Him enough and you need to be delivered of this!" (ML #2891A:56-58.)

Viv knew this is what had been happening to her. She had been feeling her faith being ripped out from her, and had all but thought the renewal period wasn't going to make any difference in her life. She had been thinking of leaving the Family, but hadn't thought listening to System music had anything to do with it. She thought it was the Family, her parents, her home, and some of the people in it that were the reason she felt as she did.

Could it actually be the songs she so enjoyed were affecting her? She began to think back, remembering that at first the songs she had listened to were about love, ones that had a good message asking where is love, and exposing the hypocrisy of the world's leaders, and about the poor and needy. It had made her feel like a true "rebel" against the System. Then she got into following the latest hits, and those songs were different. The words spoke of paying others back for putting you down, of not trusting others, of how to "dis"* others because they dissed you. Viv knew these attitudes were wrong, but the music had such a good beat and catchy words. Viv had then gotten into watching music videos on TV, and they stirred her emotions and made her feel independent and aware of what she felt was the "real world," and she had liked that. (*slang for to treat disrespectfully.)

Then Tom did something that surprised Viv and Tif. He pulled out a CD of System music and played part of a song, asking everyone to write down the emotions, feelings, and thoughts that came to them as they listened. Tom said, "Don't worry, everyone. I prayed about playing part of this song for class, and the Lord gave me the go ahead."

Tom read the message the Lord had given about it being okay to play the System music, and prayed for the keys of imprisonment to contain any negative influences from taking root. Then he put on the song, something about "voices of violence." Then Tom played, "Break the Spell" from FTT #29 and asked everyone to do the same thing. Then everyone read what they felt while listening to the two songs, and it was amazing to see the similarity in the responses.

As the class drew to an end, Tom said, "Let me read you something before we have prayer. This is taken from a Letter Dad wrote 31 years ago, but I think you'll find it is anything but "old," as it fits pretty well with what we've all just discovered from our "experiment" of listening to these two songs. Tom read:

If it's really effective music, whether good or bad, it will inspire you to action! It will move you! It will cause you to emote, create emotions which put you in motion to do good or evil. How does it make you feel? Good or bad, good or evil, godly or fiendish? What does it provoke you to do? What kind of

action does it inspire you to do? Acts of love, kindness, mercy, compassion and helpfulness?—Or thoughts of hate, cruelty, vengeance, violence, destructiveness, vandalism, wastefulness, rape, murder and war!

What kind of music are you listening to? Whose voice are you hearing? What does it do for you? What does it do to you? What does it do with you and what do you do because of it? What does it make you want to do and be, if anything? Does it bring life or death?—Good or evil? Does it make you want to live or die? Is it sad and depressing and does it make you want to quit, or is it happy and inspiring and does it make you want to live for the sake of others, to serve God and your fellowman?

That's how you know the difference between good and bad music. Just like you know the difference between any other good and bad in the world. Take the Devil and cut off his head, remove the capital "D," and you've still got evil! Chop off another head and he's still vile, and another and you've still got ill, and the last one and there's nothing left but "L"—Hell! So there's very little good about the Devil, if any. By their fruits ye shall know them.

You know the difference by the end results and the final fruits. That's how you know whether our words and music are of the Lord. It's had good results, good fruit, so the tree cannot be evil.—It's gotta be good! It's gotta be God! Hallelujah! Amen! Listen and see if you can tell the difference. Watch and see if you can see it. Feel it! How does it make you feel? Inhale it! What is its fragrance? "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." That's how you know. Come and see! You have to come before you can see. Believing is seeing! (ML #326: 44-48.)

Viv and Tif experienced something that day in class that changed their lives. They experienced the truth of the Word that Grandpa had written in that Letter "Musical Key," as well as the rest of the Word they had read.

Tom said that he was going to pray, and if anyone needed specific prayer in the area of being free from addiction to System music, that he'd include that. The girls were surprised that Tom was the first to speak up, explaining he often listened to System music on the radio while driving, thinking it was basically harmless, but that it had become a habit, and he knew it wasn't motivating him in the right way, and that he felt it affected him in the area of compromising and watering down his convictions.

Then came the time of decision.

Viv spoke up, "I'd like to ask for prayer," she said. "I've had a problem with listening to System music a lot. I've even done it at the mall in the CD section once since the renewal started. I didn't think System music had that bad of an effect on me, but since we read all this Word on it today, I see that it has been bad fruit and not good."

Tif joined in, "I've done the same thing, and I've also listened to the radio while my parents were playing with the kids at the park."

"Okay, girls," Tom replied. "Thanks for being honest. We can all pray for each other. How's that?"

"Sounds good," the girls replied, relieved that they had told the truth and also made a definite decision to change.

As everyone left devotions, Tom hugged each of the JETTs and junior teens. Viv told him, "I didn't think the System music affected me at all. I would listen to almost any System music when checking out CDs at the mall. I know it was wrong, and now I know it was making me sick spiritually, so I don't want to do that anymore. I only went once since the renewal, checking on the CDs at the mall. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Viv," Tom replied. "Thanks for confessing, and I'm glad we were all able to have prayer. Let's fight this thing together. Please let me know if you're battling about it, and we can pray and ask the Lord what to do, and I can pray with you right then."

Tif, who was standing next to Viv, said, "I always felt a little bit sneaky about what I was doing, but I figured I could handle it. I know it didn't do me any good or make me a stronger disciple. So now I want to stop, too. I really want to learn to be a true disciple and just love Jesus and souls," Tif confessed.

"You two girls could probably come up with some ideas of how to replace that System music habit with a Family music habit," smiled Tom. "I wonder if you would enjoy writing and composing songs? There's a Letter on writing songs. I can get a copy for you."

"Maybe we could organize a song-writing/composing night, or something like that," Viv said.

"Or a music night, where we just listen to music and put on skits based on the theme of the songs," exclaimed Tif.

The teens looked at each other in amazement that they were both on the same wavelength, thinking the same thing at the same time.

"We can help each other to really get on board with everything the Lord is doing," said Tif.

"Great! Let's challenge the Lord to fulfill His promise. We obey by giving up System music completely and start witnessing like crazy, and see if we'll feel as happy and fulfilled as He says," Viv said.

"Yes, that's what I want to do—just witness and learn to get out *Activated*. I don't even care what I feel, I just want to obey and be the right kind of disciple, because I really do love Jesus and want to obey Him," Tif replied.

"Oh, girl! I know you do, and so do I. Let's prove it!" Viv said emphatically.

Tom smiled and said, "And as Jesus said in that picture from the renewal Letter, 'Okay! You're on!' The Lord is going to change all our lives for the better."

And with that, Viv, Tif, and Tom left the room ready to "rock the world" for Jesus.

Key promise: When you put your will on My side, My keys will empower you to obey and follow closer than ever.

Larissa's Channel

"Mom," Larissa said. "The Word says that the renewal is going to be fun and inspiring, but that we will also need to change some of the habits we have that do not feed our spirits the right things."

"I know I have so many areas to change in, but something I have been thinking about is how difficult it is for me to receive things in prophecy. I am not so faithful in asking the Lord everything, because I have a hard time receiving things in prophecy," Larissa continued. "I have been thinking that I would like to try to strengthen my channel during this time."

Larissa continued to pour out her heart to her mom. "I don't know how I can build up this habit. I usually get only short answers to my questions. I wish I could have as clear a channel as Steffy. She always gets things from the Lord. I will never be like her. She is so spiritual, and I am not."

Larissa's mom looked compassionately at her daughter and replied, "Honey, you don't have to try so hard. Just let go and let your mind get what comes. Remember what the Word says about faith and getting things from Heaven. When you pray, if you're desperately claiming the keys and you really want to receive, it is then that you create a vacuum within you, and you just give the first thing that comes to your mind. You can start by claiming this key, 'The keys of the Kingdom give you an instant connection and a powerful link to Heaven.'"

Larissa, encouraged by this counsel, decided she would give it a try.

Everyone in the Home had talked about doing things to promote fellowship and live the Word more, and one of the activities they decided to do was a "Guardian Angel Game" in which each person was to hear from the Lord on little deeds of love and kindness they could do for their "secret partner," as well as receive little encouraging prophecies for them.

This was a great opportunity for Larissa to practice using her gift of prophecy. She had been given time to hear from the Lord for her secret partner, but instead she had used some of this time to secretly listen to System music on the radio. This had hindered her connection with the Lord, and she knew that the spirit of the music she was listening to was affecting her spirit in the wrong way.

Larissa felt convicted about what she had done. She decided to pray: "Jesus, You are my Best Friend, and You know my heart better than anyone. Please help me to be able to grow, not only in this area of receiving Your words from Heaven and asking You everything, but also forgive me for listening to System music and help me not to do it anymore. I know it won't be easy, as I

like it so much, but I know it's not good for my spirit. Please help me! I ask for a spirit helper to give me a push in the right direction and to help me to persevere. I claim the keys of strength and conviction. Thank You for doing it, Jesus."

A couple of weeks later, Larissa's mom asked, "How are things going with your prophecy time?"

Larissa looked at her with shining eyes. "Mom, I prayed and the Lord gave me a spirit helper. It's a girl my age who told me that she is waiting at all times to clear my channel with the keys. I have even been able to receive a short spirit story. If I keep on trying, I know I will get even more of them. And, Mom, I have something to tell you. I listened to System music, and I know it was wrong. It affected me in a negative way, and I'm so sorry I kept it a secret from you. That was wrong. Thank the Lord, He convicted me and I prayed and asked for His help and have stopped doing this, and my spirit helper is helping me. I promise I won't do it again. I want to change my bad habits and build new ones. I know Jesus and the keys will help me to."

Larissa's mom hugged her and looked into her eyes and said, "Honey, I am so proud of you for pulling through this test. You are such a fighter! I have been claiming the keys of the kingdom in prayer for you. I know Jesus will reward your efforts to change!"

Larissa felt such comfort and happiness inside, she knew her sacrifices were worth it all. She was taking steps to become a committed disciple for Jesus!

Key promise: To effectively stand strong in My power and live the life of a revolutionary disciple, claim the keys of conviction, boldness, and My direction to guide you, as you walk the glorious path of My will that is lined with fulfillment and joys the world only dreams of.

Lessons on Shyness

Tina dragged herself out of her bedroom. There were things that were bothering her and her spirit was feeling a little heavy. She was on her way to meet up with Renee and Jason for their witnessing expedition, and Tina had really been dreading it. Deep down Tina actually really loved to witness, and when she was younger she never had a problem with it. But as she got older, she just couldn't get over how shy she felt whenever she went out. She always felt like she was on the spot, and scared of what other people thought of her to the point that she would freeze up whenever she had to say something.

As the three of them sat discussing where they were to go, Jason piped up with the idea of going to the nearby beachfront. The thought of approaching people to witness and offering them *Activated* when there were so many people hanging out and relaxing seemed like it would be terribly embarrassing. "We'll stick out like sore thumbs for sure," she worried.

Renee could sense something was wrong. "Tina," she asked, trying to include her in on the conversation, "do you have a suggestion of where we should go today?" "Anywhere is fine, I guess," Tina answered with a shrug. "The beachfront sounds good to me," replied Renee. "Let's just ask the Lord for a confirmation." After getting some words of encouragement that the Lord was leading them in that direction, they prayed together for their witnessing, claiming the keys of protection and boldness that they wouldn't be afraid of the faces of those they witnessed to.—And they were off!

With each step, Tina seemed to dread more and more their destination and couldn't wait till the afternoon would be over and they could go back home. Jason, who was around the same age as her, was a good talker, and she would just let him do all the talking; meanwhile she'd be counting the minutes till it was time to go home.

Renee caught up with Tina and put her arm around her. Tina liked being with Renee. Though she was older and already an SGA, she was kind of like a big sister to her and someone she looked up to. "You look a little down," Renee said, "and I think I might know what the problem is." "How could you?" Tina retorted. "You seem to just love witnessing and talking to people, but for me it's like death!" With a sympathetic smile Renee responded, "Well, actually it's still difficult for me too, but the Lord gave me a key that really gave me the victory over my shyness and my fear of the opinions of the men, and now it's not as difficult as it was before.

"One day I really had come to wits' end on the subject, so I went to the Lord and asked Him about it, and He showed me something interesting. He reminded me of the fact that someone had to lead my parents to the Lord, witness to them whether they felt like it or not, and if they hadn't, then I wouldn't have been in the Family today. So if others were willing to do their part to win our parents, and all the disciples we have in the Family, all the souls that have

been saved, then it shouldn't be so hard for me to do my part, even though it may be difficult for me and kill my pride. And I've always found that once I get started, it only gets better and the Lord punches through. I can pray and claim the keys for you."

Tina felt better. Though she knew it would still be difficult, she had faith that the Lord would help her to overcome her shyness.

By the time the afternoon was over, Tina didn't want to go home! There was a group of sincere teens she had been witnessing to that were listening to every word she said. Though she was younger than them, they could see the love and conviction in her eyes, and all of them got saved. Tina felt like she could fly! "Yes," she said to herself, "this is what it's all about. This is why I'm in the Family. Not for myself or what other people think of me, but so that I can win souls to Your Kingdom, dear Jesus."

Key promises:

If you feel shy and don't know what to say, call on the keys of boldness, and then I'll have full sway.

Whether you're bold or shy, get a boost of faith through the keys.

Making a Difference

Jenna walked into her room and sat on her bed with a sigh. She found it difficult forsaking System movies during the renewal. Jenna was 13 and had been recently assigned to help out on the "Love Bugs" toddler group in her Home, and it wasn't really going so well for her. Just that morning little Tommy had spilt his milk on Suzie, which had started off a series of retaliatory events that had gotten the entire group either in tears or throwing food at one another. Thankfully Auntie Mary had stepped in and quickly brought order back to the four toddlers and all was well once again.

This feels like a bad dream, Jenna thought. *But I just don't know what to do to "wake up" and get out of it.* Just then there was a knock at the door. It was Jenna's mom, Rachel. "May I come in?" she asked?

"Sure, mom," Jenna replied.

"I just wanted to come and see how you're doing. I heard about your experience with the Love Bugs today," Jenna's mom said.

Jenna didn't know what to say. She didn't want to sound hopeless, but at the same time she needed to be realistic.

"Mom, I just don't know if I can make it. I mean I'm learning to take care of the kids, and now I can't watch System movies like before or play computer games. I'm not even good at taking care of kids.

Rachel, understanding the feelings that her daughter was going through, sent up a quick prayer and then replied, "I know what you're going through, honey, because I felt the same way once upon a time."

Jenna gave her mother a puzzled look. She had always viewed her mom as a "super mom." Rachel had 10 kids, had overseen a kitchen for 100 at a teen Home, was an accomplished seamstress, took care of many toddler groups and could organize a schedule in no time at all.

Rachel continued, "When I first joined the Family I didn't even know how to boil water. My mom had done all the cooking in my family, as well as the cleaning. I was the youngest of three in my family, so I never learned how to take care of a baby.

"When I had my first child, I felt like I was the worst mother because I didn't know how to do anything. I couldn't change a diaper or make cereal or understand why the baby always wanted to cry at three am every morning. But with time and patience I learned, and you know what? I look back at those memories now with joy, and can have a good laugh at them. Each one of my experiences has taught me so many valuable lessons. One thing I would have liked, though, is to have learned some of these things at an earlier age."

Jenna remembered the "first diaper story" her mom had told, when Mom didn't put the cloth diaper on right and it fell off just at the wrong moment.

"But there are so many other things that I want to do," Jenna said. "Fun things, like watch movies. But we can't, and I just don't feel like doing these work things unless I can have some fun as well."

"You know we have talked about doing fun outings and having fellowships, as well as other activities during the renewal," explained her mother.

"But the little kids are going to be there to mess things up, and we'll have to take care of them, so I won't have so much time to play with my friends," said Jenna.

"Jenna, everyone is going to be helping with the children," replied Rachel. "The burden isn't all on you, so don't worry. When you start a new ministry, it takes time to grow into it, and it's natural to feel the way you do sometimes. You know the younger kids can be fun, because they have so much to learn and really enjoy playing games. I notice they especially enjoy being with you."

"They do?" Jenna looked surprised.

"Yes, I've seen how they follow you around, and sometimes they cry when it's time to go back to their parents. Those are signs of love and that they care for you and that you're making a difference in their lives. Just think!—You're changing and shaping their little hearts and lives."

"I guess it is an important job," Jenna concluded.

"It is, honey, and it's something that you've been given the responsibility to do, because we know you will do a good job. You're not just taking care of them, but you're teaching and training them. Think about what you want them to learn

and then show them how to do it, like playing hide and seek or learning some 'Feed My Lambs' verses. These are just some of the things that you get to teach them, and pretty soon you'll see them grow and change," her mother explained

"Thanks, Mom," replied Jenna. "That gives me a better picture of what I'm supposed to be doing, and it also makes it more challenging. Learning to do things is fun, and I do want to learn how to take care of the kids better."

"I know one thing that you could do," Rachel said. "You could ask for a spirit helper to help you in your care of the toddlers. Also, Mary can show you how to use the TAG (Teacher's Activity Guide) and other pubs in your planning, and you could work together to come up with a practical, workable plan of things to do with the toddlers."

Key promises:

As you step out to teach the children, call on My keys of anointing and they will activate gifts that lie dormant in your heart and bring to life new talents that you never knew you had before.

Call on the keys of learning to assist you as you step out to learn new things. They will help you catch on quickly, and make speedy progress in whatever areas you ask for their help in.

Mister Branton and the Intrepid

"We head due east."

"Aye, aye, Captain," Branton replied, as he turned the smooth wooden wheel of the magnificent vessel. He had been serving on the *Intrepid* for several months now. It was hard work, but Branton loved the excitement and thrill of living on the open sea.

As the *Intrepid's* bow cut through the waves in its turn, Branton could feel the weight of the ship, fighting its force through the sea. She was a heavy vessel—weather worn, but sturdy, and modern for her time.

That night in his hammock, Branton turned to his friend Meriwether. "What a voyage we've been on, but I can't wait to get home."

"Ah, I long for some fresh victuals*, interjected Meriwether.—" A leg of mutton would do me just fine, a cut of fresh bread, and some sweets." (*food.)

"Oh, sweets! Don't even mention it." Branton said with a groan. "My mouth waters just at the thought of it."

"Soon we will reach home," sighed Meriwether.

"Soon," whispered Branton into the dank night air.

* * *

In the early morning they came across another ship of the line. It was a sailing warship large enough to be in the line of battle, and it had fresh orders for the *Intrepid*.

"War is brewing out west." The captain related this news to the crew with calmness and sobriety. It was barely dawn. "All hands on deck!" the first officer shouted. Every crew member scrambled to their positions.

Branton took his position at the wheel, but inwardly he wondered if this was really necessary. *Why can't we fight our enemies from land? Why do we have to confront them?* The captain, as if reading his mind, said, "We can't win a defensive war. We're the honor guard. We have to be in the forefront of the fight. We're needed to lead an offensive on our enemies to safeguard our homeland."

As time went on, Branton noticed that he was being instructed to steer the *Intrepid* into shallow, murky waters. They were coming near large rocks, and it was getting more difficult and tiring to steer the ship to avoid hitting them.

"You're doing well, Mister Branton," said the captain. "Just follow my directions, and we'll get through just fine."

As they came to a particularly tight turn, Branton thought, *We're not going to make it. She's just too large and unwieldy*. What is the captain thinking? (*difficult to manage.)*

But just when everyone was sure that they would hear crashing and scraping, they came through the shallows and rocks into a deeper, calmer sea.

When the enemy ship saw the *Intrepid* coming straight for it, they hadn't expected such an offensive move. They turned around quickly and sailed back to where they had come from. Their homeland would be safe from that evil for now.

"Hard to starboard," the captain instructed. In a few days the ship arrived at a lovely tropical cove where the beautiful natives greeted them and gave them gifts of food and other provisions.

While they were eating sweet fruits on the beach, Meriwether exclaimed to Branton, "This is as good as any sweet we could get back home!"

"Healthier, too," Branton added with a smile.

"I hear we could be on sea patrol quite a bit longer," Meriwether said. "The captain says there are more enemies approaching. So onward we go."

"Our captain knows what he's doing," Branton said with determination and faith. "Onward, indeed."

Key promise: When you're going through the shallow, murky waters of trials and testings, and you think you won't be able to make it, claim the keys of trust and dependence, and I will steer your ship on to victory, and into the beautiful cove of My blessings and perfect will.

A Ballerina Story

"Let's try your arabesque¹ again, Katerina. This time I want to see a better arch in your back. Extend your leg fully. That's right, much better."

Katerina's ballet instructor, Alexei, was pushing her hard today. It seemed that no matter what she did, there was always something he thought she could do a little better.

"Full pointe², Katerina," continued Alexei, as she made a fast turn on one foot that was standing on near tip toe. "No one comes to the ballet to see a half-hearted pirouette³."

"I'm doing the best I can!" Katerina said sharply, as she stopped dancing. "You're pushing me too hard. I need a break." And she marched off the studio floor into the locker room.

Alexei had been rehearsing with Katerina every day after regular ballet classes for a few weeks now. A prominent ballet company was coming to their city and holding auditions for dancers. It was only a few months away, and though Katerina was a good dancer—the best in her school—she lacked the motivation and discipline to excel as Alexei knew she could.

Alexei took a seat beside her in the deserted locker room.

"You want to make this company, right?" Alexei asked. But it was more of a statement than a question.

"You know I do!" responded Katerina emphatically. "It's all I've ever wanted. I want to go all the way. I just don't know if I have it in me to practice like this day in and day out."

Alexei put his arm around her shoulder in friendly gesture. "I know how you must be feeling, Katya," he said, using her nickname. "But if you want to be the best, you've got to train hard. You have to push yourself to the limit, and forget about how much it hurts. Think about the end result."

A tear rolled off Katerina's nose, and she pressed her head into Alexei's shoulder. He was only ten years older than her young eighteen years, but his wisdom and strength made him seem like a hundred to her. He was also a talented dancer, but had injured his shoulder early on in his career and couldn't continue performing. His love for ballet had motivated him to become an instructor.

Alexei continued, "Of course, it's up to you. You have to choose it, and want it in your heart. No one can force you."

Even though Alexei often put on a tough exterior, he had a tender heart. It was at times like this that his feelings for Katerina tore at him inside, but his position as instructor created a barrier from getting too close to her. Besides, he was sure that Katerina only viewed him as her teacher.

* * *

Later that evening Katerina sat on her bed and took off her shoes. She rubbed her sore feet and unwound the once-white bandages from around her

toes. Parts were stained a dark red now from where she had blisters. She had also broken a toenail the other day when she stumbled performing a particularly difficult leap.

"Hard day?" It was her roommate Anya, who was also an aspiring ballet dancer.

"You can say that again," replied Katerina. "Where are the days of learning the five positions, wearing only soft shoes, and never straining beyond demi-pointe⁴? I'm not sure I can take one more pirouette!"

"Well, you know what they say—no pain, no gain," remarked Anya with a smile. "Remember when we first started making the switch to pointe shoes from soft ballet slippers, we were so excited, and felt so grown up? But after the first few days of classes, we just couldn't get up on our toes one more time, our arches were so cramped. And remember how we so badly wanted to just go and hang out with our friends after school, instead of spending hours practicing ballet?"

"I remember," replied Katerina wistfully. It seemed an age ago now.

Anya continued, "But now it all seems easier. Our muscles don't ache like they used to, and our feet can do things that we never thought possible because we sacrificed and put in the time then. New things always seem hard in the beginning, but the difficulties are worth it, because the end result is so wonderful."

Katerina pondered her friend's words as she lay in bed that night. Alexei's words and kind face also lingered in her mind, and before she drifted off to sleep, she made a decision.

* * *

For the next few months, Katerina gave her all to her dance practices. Through Alexei's encouragement and persistent coaching, Katerina's dancing reached a new level of excellence. It was hard work. They were long hours that Katerina would've much rather spent elsewhere, but she committed fully to the challenge, and in the end Alexei and Katerina came up with a beautiful dance piece, which she performed for the audition.

She wowed the directors of the ballet company, and they signed her on as one of their principal dancers!

On the night of her first performance, Katerina danced with elegance and beauty—her arms in graceful movements, her toes seeming to float across the stage like a fairy's. The audience was mesmerized, and it was only at that moment that Katerina fully felt the happiness and fulfillment that was possible because of her sacrifices.

After the performance Alexei was first backstage to congratulate her. He presented her with two dozen pale lavender roses ... and a tender kiss—both of which she accepted with a blush and a heart full of love.

Key promise: Through My magical working key power I will bring beauty from ashes. I will make something from your nothing. Claim the keys of progress and commitment during this renewal period, and I will help to override the spiritual growing and stretching pains, as I work in your heart to make you a new creature.

Definitions:

1. arabesque: A position in which the dancer bends forward while standing on one straight leg with the arm extended forward and the other arm and leg extended backward.
2. pointe: Dancing that is performed on the tips of the toes.
3. pirouette: A full turn of the body on the point of the toe or the ball of the foot.
4. demi-pointe: A position on the balls of the feet.

On Beyond Mathew 24

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My Name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:3-13, NKJV).

* * *

"Excuse me, Master," piped up the disciple who sat on His right, "Can you explain more about this 'enduring unto the end'? We have Your power and have learned of Your wisdom and Your love, so how would we ever have to 'endure' anything when life with You is so wonderful?"

"Let Me tell you another little story here as an example," Jesus said. "There are many things that My disciples will have to endure at times. This is not a story that you should retell, as you will many of My other teachings, for it

is something that I want to be learned on its own by those for whom it is intended.

"There will come a time when there is another group of My disciples who are just as dedicated to Me and to My Words as you are. This group will be much larger than you, but they will have the same fire, the same dedication to Me, and the same love for My Words as you have. Some of the challenges that they will have will be the same challenges that you have, but they will have different challenges as well.

"Iniquity will abound greatly in their day, but this will not always have the same affect on these disciples as you might think. You think that you would immediately recognize and shun sin, but the evil of their time will be disguised in sheep's clothing and they will not always be able to discern it. These disciples will be very dedicated to Me and to My Words, but they will have many temptations pulling on them, and in many cases these enticements will be difficult for them to discern. Some of the things that they will be tempted with will even be useful to them if used in the proper ways and in the proper proportion, but they will have to be very prayerful and careful about the proportions and ways they use them, or else these useful things will turn into very damaging enticements.

"These disciples will be gradually weakened over time by allowing some of these iniquities of their world to creep into their lives in too great a proportion. Over time this will gradually weaken them to the point that they no longer have the fire or the power that they once had. I will then challenge them to lay aside these things that have crept into their lives and taken away their fire. By accepting this challenge they will have a great revolution in their lives and gain more power and fire than they ever had, even in their beginnings.

"To many of these disciples this time of challenge and forsaking will seem like 'enduring,' for they will have to give up some things that they will have grown to like and even cherish. They will have to endure, because they will have accepted these iniquities into their lives in such full measure that they will feel that they are a necessary and important part of their lives. But these disciples will still have great faith in Me, and as they exercise their faith in the challenge that I give them to forsake the things that are chipping away at their very life, as they endure, they will feel new life and new power growing in them. In the end they will be saved from the clutches of the Enemy and will be My mighty force of truth to the world."

Key promise: The keys will give you the faith, the strength, and even the desire to endure any sacrifice, to give up any addiction, to let go of anything that has taken on too much importance in your life.

Overnight Change

It was early morning and the sun had already been up for a while. As Emily walked around the property, the warm summer air with the heat of the sparkling sun's rays seemed to be waking up everything. As she sat down by the pond in the yard, she marveled as she saw so many little creatures and insects come out of their little night-time hiding places to enjoy the warmth and light of the sun too.

The ants were already busy at work collecting food. The grasshopper was busy chomping on the green plant he had attached himself to. There were bees busy flying from flower to flower, collecting nectar to bring back to their hives to make honey with. There were a host of other insects, some crawling and some flying around, doing she knew not what.

All Emily knew was that they all looked busy and seemed to know what they were doing. They had a purpose, and the warm, sparkly rays of the sun seemed to bring everything to life so that they could accomplish that purpose. *Wow!* she thought to herself as she pondered the meaning of it all. *It's like the warmth of what God, through His Son's rays, the Word, has recently done in my life. Now I feel a real purpose and warmth in my life too.*

Now that it was summer during the renewal period, lately Emily had been getting up early to enjoy the quiet of the morning before everyone else got up. She hadn't always been like this. She could hardly pull herself out of bed when it was wake-up time, as she had stayed up so late the night before chatting, which often led to gossiping to friends on the computer. Before, she had never wanted to take the time to stop and enjoy a sunset or lie down on the grass and enjoy looking up at the fleecy clouds passing overhead. But all this had changed now that it was renewal time and her parents and others in the Home had tuned into the young people more.

It wasn't easy at first, as it was hard for Emily to forsake all the things she liked to do. She had grown accustomed to having her own way. Emily realized that most of the time she mostly thought about herself, and was concerned with how her friends viewed her. She realized that she was like a prisoner to her friends' expectations, just doing whatever they thought was cool. She wasn't acting or living and doing what she really felt and she had lost most of the happiness and joy that she used to have.

It was a revelation when Emily finally saw what was happening to her spirit. She finally quit struggling and stopped resisting the voices of her spirit helpers and she listened to what the Lord was trying to say to her. She prayed and asked the Lord to help her, claiming the keys of faith and mercy. Emily made an effort to have a believing will, and then everything started to click and fall into place in her mind and heart. She had an overnight change and was so amazed that the happiness, joy, and purpose for living that she was really seeking for deep inside were there all the time. The answer was there all the

time and now that she had put her will on the Lord's side she was beginning to see the truth more each day.

Key promises:

The key of change can help you rise above any obstacle.

The keys of acceptance will work wonders in your life as you call on them to help you yield and accept the way I'm moving. They will radically change your outlook and help your happiness levels to soar. All you have to do is take the first step by being willing to be made willing to change.

Praise Principles

"I can't believe it's already time to get up," Tyler groaned to himself as he reached to turn off his alarm clock. It was only Tuesday morning, but Tyler already felt that he just couldn't wait for Sunday when he could sleep in and wouldn't have to go to united devotions.

"It's not that I mind devotions per se," Tyler thought, "it's just that since the beginning of the renewal period people seem to be getting more and more into singing action songs at devotions and these 'wilder' prayer and praise ideas, and it's just not my thing first thing in the morning."

That thought reminded him of the Home's last devotions and how everyone had agreed to follow the counsel of the recent Letter on praise, and were making an effort not to chant, "Thank You, Jesus, thank You, Lord" so much before praying, but were practicing saying more specific praises to the Lord.

"While I'm fine with the concept and agree with the principle behind it," Tyler thought, "it sure does make praising the Lord a lot more challenging. I guess I'm just not in the habit of praising that way yet," Tyler concluded.

SGA Theo was on devotions, and sure enough it started with a bang—the song "Praise is the Victory!" You know, the one where you have to raise your arms and praise half the time.

In the morning when I rise, and I open up my eyes, I let out a cry to Jesus ...

At that point more than half the Home raised their hands and enthusiastically said, "THANK YOU, Lord!"

"Just as I thought," Tyler sighed to himself. "I don't know why we can't just praise the Lord silently and to ourselves, I doubt there's any real good reason why we have to raise our hands when we praise the Lord—and it probably doesn't make much difference to the Lord either. I guess it's just something the adults got into, being that they were hippies before and all, like gypsy dancing, and I guess we still do it now just because it's something we've 'always' done."

By the chorus everyone in the room was raising their hands singing, *Praise, praise, praise is the victory!*

"I definitely have to raise my hands now like everyone else," Tyler thought, as he lifted his arms up in time for, *Praise, praise, praise His Name*.

"Jesus, please help me," Tyler prayed silently. "I feel so rebellious and out of it, but I do want to enter in and praise You and also be fed by Your Word this morning; I know I need it. I call on the keys of yieldedness."

After saying just that short prayer, Tyler felt so much better, happier, and more willing to participate in the devotions.

Throughout the devotions, which, incidentally, was on the subject of the power of positive praise, people pop-corned different quotes on praise that Theo had selected for the meeting.

Tyler was amazed at how applicable the quote he was given to read was, it said: "As long as you're thinking about the Scripture and the Lord and you've got a song or a praise in your mouth, you can't complain and murmur and groan and bemoan about how bad you feel!"

Toward the end of devotions Theo mentioned that after reading up on praise in preparation for the devotions he was now inspired to research and study up on the topic more, since it was such an important new weapon. "If anyone else is interested in joining me on this project," Theo added, "you're more than welcome—I'd be happy for the help."

"I would kind of like to know more about praise," Tyler thought, "the reasons for it, why it's so important and powerful, the different ways to praise, etc. Maybe I'll ask Theo if he wants my help, and that way I can also learn how to better research what the Word has to say about different things I'm interested in or wonder about."

* * *

Tyler did end up helping Theo research the topic of praise, and how enlightening it was. Not only did Tyler learn more about praise, but his desire to practice the art of praise also increased greatly, and it's even become somewhat enjoyable.

"Sure it's still difficult to praise sometimes first thing in the morning," Tyler admits, "but I now know the principles behind it and the reasons for it, and that it's a powerful weapon that defeats the Enemy, and also brings blessings into our lives when we use it. Now praising makes so much more sense to me, and that of course makes it easier to get behind it and want to do it." (See also "The Beggar Prophecy!" HTK, Vol. 1.)

Key promise: When I've asked something difficult of you, claim the keys of yieldedness as you step out by faith to obey, and it will be easier and better than you ever expected.

Renewal Remedy

There once was a girl named Jill, whose life had just come to a standstill. *No more System videos, Songs, book reading, or computer games. What else was there in life to do for fun!* she thought. Up until that time she would often fill her free-time entertainment with these activities. She seldom tried doing anything else because it seemed like so much work, and required so much time. She felt discouraged and lost wondering how she'd ever be able to survive six months without these activities she had grown accustomed to.

As she thought long and hard, the Devil's little imps started to assail her thoughts: "You shouldn't have to forsake these activities for six months. You'll be so bored and never have anything fun to do!" said one into her ear.

It was in this unhappy state her older friend, Brenda, found her and asked, "Why the gloomy face, Jill?"

She blurted out amidst the tears: "I'll never have any fun again during this renewal time, and I'm going to be bored for the next six months!"

Brenda was silent for a moment and shot up a prayer for the right words that would help bring Jill out of her discouragement.

"I thought the same thing too when I heard the news," Brenda started, "and I thought how slow the time would go and how little fun things there would be left to do. Then I stopped and prayed a prayer, as I knew the Lord has a reason for what is taking place, and He told me that I had nothing to fear. He reminded me of how many kids before us never had such entertainment and toys, yet they still seemed to enjoy themselves and find other joys. I got pictures from the past where kids were happy and looking like they were having a blast.

"I'm sure there are many things we can do that we don't know are fun, and we can use this time to learn and grow. I've often wanted to try to do different things, but would always resort to filling my time with these easy ways of passing my free time. The Lord said there was so much more than computer games and movies that can bring me happiness, and if I would only open my eyes and try out these different activities He wants me to experience, I'd see how fast the time will fly. He said I'd see so much more in life that is fun and groovy.

"So I'm giving it a try and I've decided just to say goodbye to those other things. I think it will get easier with time, and we might even wonder why we thought those things were so important, when we get the chance to go out and do something lively and new. I'm sure that there are many things to do. We can meet new people and witness to them—that's something that I'd like to do! How about you, can you think of something that you think might be fun to do?"

Jill's spirit felt revived by Brenda's enthusiasm and the encouraging words the Lord had given her. Taking a moment to think it over, a glimmer of hope came into Jill's mind as she remembered exciting testimonies that her parents and others had told her of their lives serving the Lord that had always thrilled

her. She saw how she had allowed these worldly things to pull her away from what really mattered in life.

A spirit of determination filled Jill and she looked into Brenda's eyes and said, "I want to give this renewal time my best shot, and do more to reach the lost. Maybe I could learn some new things. I could learn how to dance, play an instrument, or sing. Now I see how the Enemy was just trying to get me down. Thanks, Brenda, for coming and turning me toward the Light. I sure was down in the dumps! Will you help me find some new things to do? Could I come to you for prayer if I slip and fall back into these blues again?"

"Yes, sure!" answered Brenda, "We can learn new things together and help to kick these addictions out of our lives forever!"

And so Jill and her friend went on to things that were new. And the computer games and movies were soon forgotten and left to gather dust and cobwebs.

Key Promise: My keys will give you inspiration and motivation to find new things to learn and a desire to make the most out of this time of renewal.

Repaid 100-fold

"Dannie! Dannie!" Justin called excitedly as he walked up the stairs as fast as he could without running.

"What?!" responded Daniella, still half asleep, and somewhat annoyed at her younger brother's childish enthusiasm.

Undaunted by her rather sharp reply, Justin continued, "We're going to the amusement park for parent day! Dad says we'll witness for a couple of hours, and everyone needs to try to win at least five souls. Then we'll go on the rides, and provision pizza for dinner afterwards! And if we make our goal of getting three *Conéctate* subscriptions, we'll celebrate by getting ice cream on the way home! Dad said I can be on his team, and you and Trish can be on Mom's team. Isn't that cool?"

Daniella, who had always been "Dannie" to her family, couldn't help but be happy for her brother. *At least one of us is inspired today*, she thought to herself. She smiled at her brother and replied, "Yeah, that's great, Justin."

"I'm going to hurry up and get ready to go right now," Justin said beaming.

"Okay, I'd better do that too," replied Dannie.

After breakfast and devotions, Dannie and her family were on their way. The day was beginning to look up. Dannie remembered something the Lord had told her a few days before, about how He would bless and do extra special things for her every time she did something loving and unselfish for her younger brother and sister. She decided today was as good a time as any to put His promise to the test.

"As her dad drove them to their witnessing spot, Dannie asked Justin, "Wanna play 'Who am I?'"

"Oh yes, can I be first?" Justin asked.

"Sure, go ahead," Dannie replied.

They arrived at their witnessing spot, and after passing out some tracts for about half an hour, Dannie's mom had gotten into witnessing to someone, and Trish, Dannie's 2-1/2 year old sister, was starting to get restless.

"I'll play with her over here while you finish." she told her mom.

"Thanks so much, honey," her mom said.

Trish's favorite game was hide-and-seek. She loved to hide in the same place over and over and over, and Dannie was thankful she was so easy to take care of. As they were playing their game, Dannie noticed a lady with her young son approaching them.

"¿Hola, cómo esta usted?" Dannie said.

The woman, replying in Spanish, said, "Ah, you speak Spanish! I heard you speaking English to your little sister and thought perhaps you were visiting our country."

"My parents have been missionaries in this country for many years and I was born here," replied Dannie, speaking fluent Spanish.

The woman, who introduced herself as Señora Lucia, mentioned to Dannie how impressed she was by the sample of love and care Dannie took for her little sister. Dannie thanked her and explained that she came from a large family and that she was watching her little sister for her mom who was nearby.

Señora Lucia introduced the young boy with her, who was her son, Pedro. As Dannie stood there holding Trisha's hand, she got an inspiration to explain to Señora Lucia about the *Treasure Attic* videos, thinking perhaps the lady would like them for her son. Then Dannie began witnessing to Señora Lucia, and she prayed with her to receive the Lord.

Señora Lucia could not resist Dannie's enthusiasm and conviction. Dannie told her about the *Conéctate* magazines, that she might be interested in them, and brought her over to her mom who had just said goodbye to the woman she had been witnessing to. Dannie asked if her mom had any *Treasure Attic* videos she could show Señora Lucia, as well as a *Conéctate* mag.

Thank the Lord, her mom had a video packet to show her, which Señora Lucia readily bought. Her mom explained about the *Conéctate* magazine and Señora Lucia agreed to get a subscription. Not only that, they also got Señora Lucia's phone number to arrange for her to come over for a visit. Dannie was on cloud nine, and it was only 12:30!

The day just got better from that point on. They ended up getting three subscriptions to *Conéctate* and Dannie got to ride on the new roller coaster and it was a blast. The pizza was delicious and a touch of the Lord's love, as provisioning at amusement parks in the past hadn't been so easy.

There's nothing quite like meeting a real sheep and witnessing to them, Dannie thought. She was thrilled how the Lord had helped her to succeed in her push to think more about others, and that now their home had a new person to follow up on.

Talk about blessings for going God's way! she thought. *I'm sure glad I made that decision!*

Key promise: I delight in rewarding you for every deed done in love "as unto Me." By calling on the keys of discovery, you can become more aware of My blessings, whether "obvious" or "hidden."

Rhambau's Treasure

Rhambau, an elderly pearl diver in India, clung to the hope of earning his way to Heaven. "The gods must not be pleased with one who is not working for a place in Heaven," he told Mr. Grayson, a missionary. Pointing to a man on the street, he added, "That pilgrim goes perhaps to Bombay—or Calcutta. He walks barefoot and picks the sharpest stones to step on. See how he sometimes kneels down and kisses the road? That is good!" Rhambau sighed. "I am getting old. I must prepare for the life to come," he added. "The first day of the New Year, I also begin my pilgrimage. I shall make sure of Heaven. I shall go to Delhi—on my knees. The gods will reward me with Heaven."

"But, Rhambau," pleaded Mr. Grayson, "Jesus died to purchase Heaven for you. You must simply believe and accept His free gift of salvation. Can't you see that, my friend?" "No, no, that is too easy," insisted Rhambau.

Shortly before Rhambau was to leave for Delhi, he showed Mr. Grayson a beautiful pearl.

"My son, a diver, found this pearl," said Rhambau, "but he stayed under the water too long! He died soon after. I want you to have it, my best friend."

"Oh, I'm so sorry about your son's death," exclaimed Mr. Grayson, "but let me buy the pearl from you."

Rhambau shook his head. "No one in all the world has enough money to pay what that pearl is worth to me," he answered sadly. "You may have it only as a gift."

"But that is too easy," exclaimed Mr. Grayson. "I must pay for it—or work for it."

Rhambau spoke quickly, "Don't you understand? I would never sell this pearl—its value is in the lifeblood of my only son. Just accept it as a token of the love I bear for you."

Then Mr. Grayson explained. "Rhambau, don't you see?" he asked gently. "God offers you salvation as a free gift. It is so great and priceless that no one could pay for it. It cost God the lifeblood of His only Son to make it possible for

you to enter Heaven. In a million years—or in hundreds of pilgrimages—you could never earn entrance to Heaven! All you can do is accept it as a token of God's love for *you*."

Key promise: Through the keys of witness I will anoint you with wisdom and answers to questions you may be asked. I will give you just the words to say to reach each person's heart, and help them to find Me.

Short-Circuited

Incredible!" exclaimed Martin. "Doesn't anything get you down?"

Martin sat in the van exasperated while Uncle Chris sat behind the steering wheel praising away. The car had come to a dead stop on a side street in the downtown area. It was a drizzly, chilly day and Martin and Uncle Chris had been out on a provisioning run. And now with a vanload of frozen chicken in the back, the old van had given up the ghost.

Chris continued praising in tongues for a moment more and then turned to Martin with a smile. "There was a time in my life when it didn't take much to upset me, and sadly I formed the habit of cussing about things, but it never helped a bit."

"Yeah, I know it doesn't help," replied Martin, "but I just get so mad when this kind of thing happens that I've got to let off steam. I would go crazy if I didn't!"

"I almost went crazy because I did!" replied Chris. "I used to get so mad that you could hardly tell the difference between me and an average heathen. I used to justify myself that I was just "letting off steam." I got so used to cussing that even the littlest things, like misplacing the car keys or spilling a drink would tick me off, and foul language would roll right out of my mouth. I started to have serious stomach ulcers, but didn't see the Lord's hand in my life trying to help me."

"So what happened?" asked Martin.

"Oh, I got to be such a bad sample that I almost had to leave. I got really sick too because of the ulcers and had to be hospitalized for treatment. It took me being flat on my back, and of all people, a doctor telling me that my attitude was making me sick, for me to ask God to change me.

"I mean, here I was a missionary telling people that they can have peace in Jesus, and it took a doctor to tell me that I needed to have a peaceful attitude! Boy, did I feel embarrassed. Here my crummy complaining attitude was making me sick, even killing me, when I had the secret to peace and contentment and had been telling others about it for years, but had totally neglected to apply it to myself.

"Anyway, I made up my mind that by the grace of God I was going to be a new me; that I was going to beg Jesus to short-circuit those cussing thought patterns. It took some time, but He did the work in me, and I'll tell you, I'm not going to let an old van get the better of me now!"

Martin looked at Chris and the angelic smile that seemed to fill his face. Martin couldn't help but smile too. He liked Chris, but sometimes Chris's sunny optimism had grated on him.

"Life is full of surprises," Martin said looking at Chris. "I would have never thought your always being cheerful and praising came about from having a problem with cussing!"

"Speaking of surprises, I'm interested in what surprise the Lord has for us in this situation," said Chris. "How about if you help push the car and I'll steer it to the side of the road. The Lord knew we were going to break down here so there must be something He has for us to do here as well. Let's see what adventure He has up His sleeve!"

Key Promise: Bad habits can kill you, but claiming the key of praise and making praise a habit will bring life, and with that life, joy and contentment.

The Choice

"Hey, Roxy! Are you coming to the park with us?" It was Kyle putting on his shoes in the hallway. "We're going to Greenbriar Park just down the road. Dave and I are putting together a game of roller hockey with a few guys from the other Home. You have blades, right?"

"Yeah, I don't know, Kyle," replied Roxanne. "I was thinking of getting some extra Word today, maybe catching up on a few z's."

"Oh, come on," pleaded Kyle. "What are free days for, anyway? If you sleep and read them away, they're gone like that!" he snapped his finger for emphasis.

Dave had just come down the hallway, helmet on his head, and rollerblades slung over his shoulder. He joined Kyle in the pleading. "Carpe Diem*, Roxy! It'll be fun. Besides, we need a sixth player. Pleeeeasssse, foxy Roxy!" he finished with a mock kneel to her. (*seize the moment)

"Not if you call me that, I won't," Roxanne said with a smile. Then she rolled her eyes, and said, "Fine, I'll come."

"Thank you, thank you!" Dave and Kyle said repeatedly as they kissed her hands.

"Okay, enough." Roxanne said laughing, as she pulled away from them. "I'll go change my clothes."

In her room, the thought passed through Roxanne's mind that she really should get a confirmation from the Lord as to whether or not she should go to

the park. But she brushed it off, thinking,, *I already said I'd go. Besides, I need to get out of the house. It does sound like more fun than what I was planning on doing.*

Roxanne's Home had just started the renewal period a few weeks earlier, and it was proving to be a difficult adjustment for the older teens. Their Home was pretty short on FGAs, so the older teens—Roxanne, Kyle, and Dave—lacking the needed shepherding, hadn't quite gotten fully into the spirit of the renewal as they were supposed to, and were struggling with coming up with replacements for worldly input.

The FGAs in the Home were struggling with the Home schedule and the care of the kids, especially since the main childcare person had just gotten pregnant and was pretty incapacitated. At the moment, the teens weren't getting as much focus or supervision as the FGAs had been hoping and planning to give them.

So, just for this one free day, the teens were being trusted to entertain themselves and head to the park alone, provided they stuck together.

* * *

When the three of them reached the park, the first thing they noticed was that the hockey court was already in use by some other neighborhood kids, and it was already a pretty crowded game.

"Man! Why are they here today?" exclaimed Dave in frustration. "The court is usually free this day of the week!"

Roxanne started, "Well, I guess we should head b..."

"Hey look, there's Nick and AJ," said Kyle, pointing to some neighborhood guys that they had played basketball with a few times before. Nick saw the three of them and waved them over.

Roxanne quickly interjected, "Hey, guys, during this renewal period, aren't we supposed to not hang out with System friends unless we're actually witnessing?"

"Take it easy, Roxy, we're just gonna say hi, and see if maybe they wanna' play some b-ball," Dave said. But Nick and AJ were heading to the mall across the street. "Hey, guys, you want to come along?" they called.

"I think we probably have to be going," Roxanne said politely. But Dave and Kyle didn't take the hint.

"Come on, Roxy. It'll be fine," Kyle said, hoping to sound assuring. "That GN said something like 'Avoid going to the mall,' I don't think it said 'never'. We'll just go this once."

Just this once. The words echoed in Roxanne's head. The Lord's Spirit urged her again to stand up for her convictions, but she thought, *That would be too embarrassing. How would we explain it to Nick and AJ? Besides, even if I decided to turn around and walk home now, I can't exactly go by myself. The guys would have to agree to leave too.*

As she joined the boys, they all crossed the street and headed into the mall.

* * *

They had been wandering aimlessly around the mall for about 20 minutes when Nick and AJ stopped in front of the local movie theatre. Nick said, "Hey, that new summer flick is out! You know, 'Alien Rising—Attack of the Mutants'? It's supposed to be awesome! Want to check it out?" At that, Kyle, Dave, and Roxanne all looked at each other.

"I've seen the previews for that one for like six months now!" said Dave in a lowered voice to Kyle and Roxanne, "I don't want to have to wait for *another* six to see it!"

"Dave! The previews haven't been showing for six months, and you know it." Roxanne said with urgency. "Besides movies are totally nixed right now, and this one wouldn't make it in the *Grapevine* even if they weren't. We should get back home."

Nick and AJ noticed their hesitation, and AJ added, "Come on, the tickets will be on us." Turning, they walked through the theatre doors.

"No one has to know," said Kyle to the others. "The adults aren't expecting us back till dinnertime. They'll never find out."

At that moment, Roxanne realized that she had been getting checks from the Lord all day, at various points of decision. She hadn't heeded most of them, at least not fully. Now she was stuck in this awkward position, and it was because she had allowed herself to stray pretty far from the rules. She also realized that if she had had more conviction, she probably could have persuaded the guys to keep within the boundaries of the rules as well.

Roxy stood frozen in indecision. She had to make a choice. Would she stand up for her convictions, persuade the guys to head back home with her, and risk embarrassment because of their System friends? Or, would she go along with the movie in compromise, risking either longstanding unconfessed guilt, or confess and reap the consequences of her actions?

What would *you* do?

Key promises:

When Satan tempts you to stray from My will, claim the keys of resistance and conviction to fight against his attacks, and I will help you not only to make the right choice, but I will send Satan and his imps packing, with a swift kick in their pants.

When you feel yourself wavering in your convictions, call on My strong key power of faith and boldness, and I will sweep away any embarrassment you feel. I will then cloak you with My garment of humility, and fill you with boldness to fight against the Enemy's temptations to compromise.

The Dark Forest?

Jenna stood at the edge of the forest with a look of shock and fear on her face.

"There's no way I am going to like this. It looks dark, dingy, and so boring. I know it's a long trek to the other side and I have to go through here whether I like it or not, but that doesn't make me happy about it at all."

Just then, she heard a little voice, faint as a whisper in her heart: "All you need to do is put one foot in front of the other and you'll be amazed at what you'll find."

"Yeah, I'll find lots of cool stuff? –Suuure." She said in a mocking tone as she started to walk in.

At first it was all she had imagined:

"It's dark, overgrown, and I've never been one for nature appreciation at all. I wish this forest had never been created."

Suddenly, a voice came from behind one of the trees: "Psst! Over here! Jenna, Jenna!"

"I must be hearing things! I'm totally alone in this forest! No, no, I'm going crazy. There's nothing there, I just have to endure it and I'll make it out to the other side. I have to. I'll just grin and bear it."

Then the voice she'd heard grew louder and louder and there were more voices coming from all around her now. They weren't normal. They sounded more like the wind blowing through the trees, but at the same time, they were making words.

"Whoosh!"

"What was that?" Jenna was not only sad, but now she was afraid too.

Then she saw it again, a little traveling light.

"It's coming closer and it's so dark, I can't see well enough to run. Oh, Jesus, I can't take this anymore!"

As the light grew closer and circled her a few times, thousands of glowing sparkles surrounded Jenna and she felt warm, happy, and unafraid.

Then the light spoke:

"Hi! I'm Celia, and I'm your fairy-angel!"

"Do you mean my guardian angel?" Jenna asked.

"You could say that," Celia answered.

"Why can't I see you?"

"Because you need to believe that I'm here!"

"Okay, I believe. I want to see you; I want more of that light! It's so dark in this forest and I have so much longer to travel," Jenna said.

Then the single light that had been fluttering quickly through the trees came to rest a few feet from Jenna.

"You're a fairy!" Jenna exclaimed in excitement and joy.

"Yes! And I'm here to be your companion through the forest. Did you know that this is a magical forest? It looks plain, but there's so much to see, so much to do and explore! Would you like me to take you through it and show you all the wonderful things?"

Jenna was skeptical and thought to herself, *How could there possibly be anything cool about this forest, it just looks scary and unappealing to me.*

Celia heard her thoughts and answered, "It takes a believing heart and willingness to walk where I lead. Are you willing?"

"It can't hurt. Yes, I'm willing."

So Celia pointed out the tree beside them and told Jenna to climb it. Celia raised her arms and threw millions of little glowing sparkles into the air so that Jenna could see enough to get up the tree.

"Now, do you see that fruit right there? Take it and try it out. It's not so pretty on the outside, but it's going to be delicious!"

Again Jenna had to trust and obey even though it didn't look that great, and as soon as she reached out for it and picked the fruit off the tree, the whole tree erupted into beautiful colors and it shined brightly as if it was covered with gems and diamonds that sparkled and shone. Beautiful flowers grew around the tree too.

"That's amazing!" Jenna exclaimed. "Will it happen to all the trees if I climb them and pick a fruit?"

"No," Celia answered, "each tree is different, so you'll need to find out for yourself."

The rest of the journey through the forest was filled with light, wonder, and excitement as Jenna ran to each tree and discovered what the key was to bringing it to life! She didn't want to leave the forest when it came time for her travels to end. She was so happy she had listened to her fairy-angel or she would have missed the magic that was waiting to be discovered.

Key promise: Ask Me to open your eyes in the spirit so that anything that seems mundane can be magical through one touch of My keys of Heaven.

The House That Wouldn't be Renovated

There was a house that sat at the end of a street of houses. A lot of rebuilding and renovating had been taking place on that street, and this house at the end, which we'll call Harry, just watched in wonderment.

One day the master builder came to Harry and said, "Harry, as you've seen, I've been doing important renovations on my houses on this street, in order to fortify them and make them strong to stand up to the weather conditions of the coming years. I'd also like to do renovations on you. Would that be okay?"

Harry said, "Well, what kind of renovations are you talking about?"

The master builder said, "First I'd start underground, with your pipes. Your sewage management system is outdated and overloaded. You have more waste than your current pipes can handle, and the result is that your sewage is overflowing into the garden."

Harry felt uneasy. "My pipes! But ... but ... I've used this waste management system for so long! Do you really have to revamp it? After all, the overflowing sewage provides fertilizer for my garden. ... Oh, my garden! If you dig up and replace all the pipes, my garden will be a big mess for months to come."

"Yes, I wanted to mention your garden. You might have plenty of fertilizer, but from the looks of things, all that flourishes in your garden is an abundance of weeds. All the good fruit trees and rose bushes have been crowded out."

"Oh, I'd rather you didn't mess with the pipes."

"Are you sure, Harry? I'd also put in larger fresh water pipes, so you'd get plenty of water to keep your house clean and sanitary. You've been existing on inadequate water rations for years. I could fix that!"

Harry responded, "Oh, I have plenty of fresh water—a few drops a day is all I need. I know things are getting a little cruddy around here due to lack of cleaning, but I think the extra coats of dust and grime add an old-time charm to the place, don't you? Anyway, you don't have to worry about my pipes—I'll spare you and your workmen the extra labor! Now, what else was it you wanted to renovate?"

The master builder was already feeling a little discouraged, but hoped he could yet persuade Harry.

"You'll be happy to know we'd upgrade your windows! Yours are pretty small and don't let much light in, and I have brand new shiny ones that'll make such a difference to your house."

"My windows?!" cried Harry. "You have got to be joking. These windows have been the same ones since I was just a baby. They're cute and small, and because not many people can see in, they also afford great levels of privacy. There are things that go on in my house for weeks and months that nobody on the outside is aware of, because of these windows."

"Exactly," said the master builder. "And they were okay for times past, but the way of the future is to let more light in, to be more open, to get rid of those

private little places where mold and mildew grow so easily, where spiders love to hide. I can promise that although the increased light might take getting used to at first, you'll soon grow to love it and wonder what you've ever done without it!"

Harry sighed. Things weren't looking so great at all.

"Let's just leave the windows on hold for now. What else do you have in mind?"

"There's your driveway. It's pretty narrow, and I was hoping to rebuild it much wider."

"Whatever for?" said Harry in surprise. "It fits my owner's personal bicycle quite well."

"Yes, but you'd have more company if you made more space for others to drop by."

"Ha, why would I want others to drop by?"

"Well," responded the master builder slowly, "for one, they could help you in your garden—the one I'm hoping to newly plant in place of this old one. You could fellowship in your newly cleaned and lighted interior, and..."

Harry had heard enough. "Dear master builder, from the sounds of it, you want to completely destroy who I am, take away all the things I love about myself, and upset the apple cart of my existence!"

The master builder looked thoughtfully at Harry.

"Do something for me, will you, Harry? Look down this street at all the other houses I've been working on. Do they look destroyed? Yes, I know they're different looking, but don't they look happier, more light filled, more beautiful with their newly-planted gardens, and more exciting with all the visitors they're now entertaining?"

Harry looked down the street. Things had become quite exciting around him, and he'd actually begun to feel left out. He hadn't thought of connecting the renovations with all the new and wonderful things the other houses were experiencing. He'd seen all the workmen and rebuilding equipment as so much noise and hassle that he hoped would go away soon. But now he was seeing things in a different way.

Harry gulped and looked again at the master builder. It was going to be hard to say this, but he determined to try.

"I just realized that all this time I've been arguing with you, I've forgotten one important thing.—I belong to you! You built me to begin with, and if you think it's about time to make some improvements around the place, how can I argue? After all, you're the reason that I exist in the first place, and even if the changes seem uncomfortable at first, I know you care for me, and that all the changes you're proposing will work out for the best. I can see that taking place already in the other houses on my street, and I just realized that I don't want you to waste any more time.

"You can clear anything out of my house that you don't think is beautiful or

helpful, clean it up just as shiny as you can, and make it fit for future use by you. I know once you're through with me, I'll just be happier and more useful and that because of what you plan to do, I won't fall into ruin, but will be newly remade and useful for decades to come!"

The master builder looked up at Harry, and Harry saw that there were tears of gratitude in his eyes.

"Thanks Harry," he said softly, "I promise you won't regret putting yourself in my capable hands."

Key Promise: As you claim the keys of faith, and let Me revamp the house of your life the way I see fit, you will find your joys growing and your usefulness abounding. Most of all you will be strong enough to face whatever storms in life are ahead in the future.

The Knight's Son

In days of yore there was a strong castle fortress that overlooked a busy town. In that castle lived the Brotherhood of the Lion, a group of the strongest and bravest knights in the kingdom. Alyn was the son of one of these mighty knights. Most would say he was born under a good star to have been blessed with such a high and noble birth with a bright future—that of a knight—instead of a common peasant or worker.

Alyn was a strong lad and he was being trained as a squire in the knightly ways by his father, Sir Mator, and the other knights that lived with them in the castle. There were other boys about Alyn's age in the castle who were also squires receiving this training, and together they learned reading, writing, Latin, mathematics, and the sciences. They also learned the arts of war: how to care for and ride a horse, swing a sword and battleaxe, joust with a lance, shoot a bow, but most of all to be brave, loyal to their king, and honorable in all things.

You may think it sounds quite exciting to be trained to be a knight, but Alyn and his friends didn't always see it that way. There were parts they enjoyed more than others, but most of the time it just felt like work to them and not much fun. They wanted to be knights someday, but that seemed so far off. It seemed the day when they would be given their own bright suit of armor and strong charger was too far away. It was lost somewhere beyond a haze of candlelit evenings spent forming characters on parchment, and days of shoeing and brushing horses, lifting logs, carrying water, and swordplay against dummies of wood and straw.

What Alyn and his friends enjoyed was to go down to the town where they would seek out the entertainers, who were much like what a circus is today. There were singers, dancers, jugglers, sword-swallowers, magicians, and strange animals from faraway lands. Alyn especially admired the jugglers and magicians; it seemed so exciting to him that they got to travel from town to town

entertaining the people. He liked the way they didn't seem to have to do much—no chores, no practice, no long days and nights of training, just traveling here and there eating where they wanted, sleeping where they wanted, and doing pretty much whatever they wanted.

Alyn and his friends made frequent visits to the entertainers' camp, and they enjoyed themselves very much. Alyn started to become friends with one of the jugglers and to learn a little of his craft, how to balance, toss, and catch various objects. Sir Mator and the other knights from the castle knew that the young squires would go to the town, and as long as they completed their studies first and were in bed early enough to have strength for the next day, they allowed it.

However, over time the boys began to spend too much time in the town to the neglect of their training. Alyn in particular would lag long after the other boys had left, eating and drinking with the jugglers and partying with them late into the night. His father talked to him about this, and told him that it was best that he returned earlier, but Alyn wasn't so sure.

"What if I'm tired of being a squire?" he said. "What if I want to join the entertainers and travel from place to place entertaining people, living my own life, eating, drinking, and sleeping where I please? Can I not do as I wish?"

Sir Mator looked gravely but kindly on his son, and said, "Son, you are not yet old enough to do as you wish. You must obey what I tell you. But if you truly do not wish to be a knight, you may stop your training and spend more time in the town. You may not live with the minstrels, but I free you to spend your days there if that is what you desire. Just think about it carefully, son, and tell me what you decide."

Alyn thought about it that night, and although he wondered if he was disappointing his father, the next day he told him that he indeed wanted to cease his training at the castle and spend more time in the town, learning the minstrel ways. His father said that he could go ahead and do that, if it was what he really wanted.

Alyn was happy and made his way down to the town and began spending his days there. At first it was a lot of fun—no chores, no training, not much of anything. His friends, however, continued on in their training at the castle. A few weeks later they visited the entertainers' camp where they met Alyn. He was excited to see them, and happily told them about the new and different things that he was experiencing with the entertainers.

His friends were not impressed, though. They missed him, they wanted him back, and they thought he was being most foolish to give up the good and honorable life he could have as a knight and waste his time entirely with the minstrels.

"Look here," they said. "The minstrel camp is good and fun sometimes when we're tired from our training, but you cannot make a life of it. We are sons of knights! We are being trained to be the rulers of this land. We cannot ignore

the place that we have been given. There are plenty of other men's sons who may be minstrels, but we are born to serve the king, not just as bakers or stable boys, but as knights, defenders of justice and peace in this kingdom. Leave this foolishness, Alyn, and return with us."

"Yes, come back and train again, Alyn," said another. "For look how we have grown stronger in these last few weeks, while you have become weaker. We have advanced in our training. Sir Mator has promoted us from the sword dummies to sparring with him and the other knights with blunted blades. We are gaining strength, while here you waste your life. Return with us."

Alyn was moved by their words, and he did return with them to the castle. He apologized to his father for having been so eager to try something new that he had forgotten how much he was blessed to have. He returned to his studies, and continued, day by day, to grow into a strong knight of the kingdom.

A few years later, Alyn's mother sent their younger son to begin his training as a knight at the castle. When he and the younger brothers of his friends grew tired at times from their training, and would visit the minstrel camp in the town, Alyn and the other older boys would go along with them, making sure that no matter how much fun they thought it was, that they knew their place was at the castle, growing strong and becoming knights.

Once when they had an especially hard day of training ahead, the young boys wanted to visit the town, but Alyn forbade them. When they protested and asked what was so bad about the town, Alyn replied:

"It's not that the town and the minstrel camp are so bad. It is sometimes permitted that we go there and be entertained. But when we need to keep our mind on our training and studies, we have to make sure that we don't allow ourselves to be distracted from the reason why we are here with the temptation of an easier and simpler life. I can tell you from experience that the more time you spend with a juggler, the less like a knight you will want to be.

"I have found that doing too many things purely for entertainment or relaxation or fun can take away from the desire I have to do the things that really count. But when I spend time on my training and striving for my goals, then I have the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction that comes from reaching those goals. And it will result in my gaining something that can never be taken away from me—my knighthood!"

Key Promise: The keys of patience will help you get through your time of training, and will see you through to the time when you are dubbed a knight of My Kingdom.

The Rosebush

Alyssa stepped into her Home's backyard and looked out at the rosebush. It was dying. The leaves were dry, the pretty pink roses were wilting, and the petals were turning brown. She thought back to the day when her mom had provisioned the rosebush for her: "You're going to take good care of this, right, Alyssa? It's your responsibility now."

"Yes, I'll take super good care of it!" she had said. But after the first week of tending to her precious plant, she started to get bored and began to neglect it more and more. She went back to spending more time playing computer games and watching movies, and felt she had no time to care for her rosebush.

Just this afternoon Alyssa had heard the news of the renewal, and that she'd have to forsake her videos, computer games, and novels. After a good prayer with Mom and Dad for the renewal, that she would be able to understand and be happy about this change and see the good, Alyssa had walked slowly through the house. Everything had seemed dark and gloomy, like a big shadow had just been cast over her life. She had passed through the living room and out to the back porch, where she now stood, looking at her dying rosebush. "Everything that I enjoy is dying or dead. No more movies, no more TV, and now, no more rosebush!" She sank to the floor and began to cry.

SGA Laura had been in the living room tidying up when Alyssa walked through, and Laura had noticed that Alyssa was sad. The Home knew that her parents would be talking to her and explaining the renewal, and they'd all been praying that it would go well. Laura walked out and put her hand on Alyssa's shoulder. "It's going to be ok, you know?" Alyssa turned to look at Laura, and disbelief was on her face, along with many tears.

"Yes, it really is!" Laura reassured her. "It might seem like a punishment now, but we have so many things planned, and all of us are going to work hard to make sure that you have a great time! And look! Your rosebush is looking pretty sad. When was the last time you watered it?"

"I don't know, maybe a week ago." Alyssa answered.

"Well," said Laura, "How about you and I starting off this renewal with a pledge to get that rosebush back to life! We can go get some books on gardening, we can provision any of the tools we need, and we can use the opportunity to get out some *Activated* mags and have fun together! What do you think?"

Alyssa thought for a moment. *I like Laura a lot, and this is my chance to spend time with her. And if she wants to help me with my rosebush, that's not too bad an offer.*

Alyssa nodded in agreement.

"Wonderful! I'll start planning some things that we can do, and I'll ask around and see what things we'll need to get for the gardening." Laura said.

Alyssa had never been too interested in gardening before, but since this was her special rosebush, she took the plunge, learned all she could, and had a great time finding a new friend in Laura.

Pretty soon, they weren't just working on the rosebush, but they provisioned a box of flower seeds, and soon the garden was filled with beautiful flowers, plants, and even some special bird baths that one of their Activated friends brought over as a gift for Alyssa, who had been such a good sample of sticking to a job and doing it well.

Alyssa was so happy. She'd learned how to provision, and how to care for plants. She had so much fun and fulfillment in doing something productive that she hardly missed her computer games or movie time. She had found so many better things to do and learned so much! She didn't even want to go back to spending so much time watching movies or playing computer games or any of the other pastimes that she had had before, because now she saw how happy life was when you spend time with others doing something useful!

Key Promise: The keys will fill your life with happiness, purpose, and motivation. Get their power working on your behalf by simply calling on them, and your life will be transformed into something truly beautiful.

The Super Sheep

"You know I have been tagging along all my life witnessing and praying with people to get saved, but I think today was the first time I was really moved by it!" Jason was relating the day's witnessing testimony to Rose, his older sister.

Rose stopped to look at him sideways. *Is that my younger brother talking?* she thought.

"Really?" she asked out loud. "Pray do tell all!" she added inquisitively.

"Yeah, it was really strange!" replied John. "I dunno what was different, really, but this time Mom was talking to this girl in the park and I was sort of hanging around being the designated smiler. But Mom had to rush off after our darling little sister who was about to try some death-defying leap from the jungle gym. So I just sort of took up where Mom had left off, and it was amazing! The girl was telling me all about her life and how boring it all was, and from what she was saying it sure didn't sound too exciting. So when she stopped, I just popped the question."

"Will you marry me?" Rose said laughing.

"Yeah, right!" Jason answered. "I said, 'Wanna ask Jesus in your heart?' and she nodded. I took her hand, and she was shaking as she repeated the prayer. When I opened my eyes and looked at her, she was crying and laughing at the same time. I mean, I got tears in my eyes too! She hugged me and wanted to do it all over again! I felt like, wow! I have never had that happen before."

Rose looked at Jason and he really was beaming as he told the tale. "My, little brother, you are changing! I never thought I would see you so excited over a witness that didn't involve provisioned ice cream." The words should have sounded sarcastic but they weren't. She was genuinely touched at the depth of emotion that Jason seemed to feel.

"I'll take that as a compliment," replied Jason as he went on with his story. "Anyway we must have talked for half an hour and it was pretty cool that I could tell her things and answer her questions. The girl's a super sheep! Never thought I would say that about anyone, but I guess there are people who are. Mom wandered over for half a minute to check on us, but then she left me alone to witness. Got her phone number so will be calling her later tonight to invite her over. Anyway, see you, Sis! I've got to go figure out what to say to her.

"Oh, you know something stupid? I didn't even ask her her name. Hope she's the one that answers the phone when I call."

Key promise: The keys were made to help your witness.

What is an Individual?

Young Caleb had asked his parents if he could color his hair and get a new hairstyle. "I want to be a nonconformist," Caleb said.

Caleb's mom replied, "You'll look different, Caleb, but I wouldn't say you are going to be a nonconformist. If millions of others are doing the same thing, then you are being a conformist like all of them. You are conforming to that particular fashion."

"But I want to express my individuality," said Caleb.

"That is possible, honey. You don't have to be part of the 'masses.' You can express your individuality. Coloring your hair may seem different to you, but it's really following fashion. Lots of people color their hair and wear 'cool' hairstyles."

"It's frustrating, Mom," pouted Caleb. "I hate looking like everyone else. I want to be different."

"Come here, honey," said Caleb's mom, as she took his hand and pulled him toward her in a hug. "I want you to be able to be an individual and be different too. Who wants to be just like everyone else? Let's sit down here on my bed and ask the Lord what He has to say about this, okay? I know it's important to you, and if we ask the Lord, I know He'll answer our questions."

"Okay, Mom," agreed Caleb. Caleb and his mom brought their question, "What is an Individual?" to the Lord, and the Lord was faithful to answer them.

(Jesus:) What is an individual? It depends on whose ruler you are using to measure your individuality by. If you are truly revolutionary, you don't want to

use the System's "ruler" to measure your individuality. If you are doing what is right, you may feel you are conforming, when in reality you are standing out from the crowd. It's like your Father David taught you in the poem he received, *Don Quixote*; they in the world are the ones who are conformists, and they don't even know it.

So what is an individual? It is one who is a radical in heart and who follows Me and obeys Me. It is the inward man that makes you an individual that will go down in history.

It's man's vanity as well as human nature to want to be different, to break from the norm and express this difference through your appearance at times. But it's not true individuality. True individuality is expressed in the do-or-die spirit of being willing to follow Me no matter what the cost, in the attitude that My Words are the most radical teachings that have ever been, because they change the heart of man. If you want to be a true individual, make the change of living radically for Me from your heart—then you will stand out as being truly different. You will have the fire and the spirit that will make others want to follow Me as well. Then you will be individuals who will change the history of man and the world as you presently know it. (*End of message.*)

"Does that help you, son?" asked Caleb's mom.

"Yes, Mom. These are all the things the Lord is asking of us during the renewal period," replied Caleb.

"You're right. Lord help us all to grow and become His true individuals. I love you, son. I'm glad we had this time to talk and pray together," replied his mom.

"Me, too, Mom," Caleb said. "It makes me feel like we're in this together."

His mother smiled, "We are, Caleb, and I'm happy for this time where I can learn once again what being an individual really means in the Lord's eyes. I love you, son."

"I love you, Mom," replied Caleb, and with that they hugged and got up to live their lives as true individuals for the Lord.

Key Promise: The keys of revolution will make you an individual, because only when rebelling against Satan can you really be the individual I made you to be.

What Matters Most

"Wait for me!" Julie panted as she ran to catch up with her brother Anthony. Julie was eight and Anthony was 13. In spite of the fact that Julie was younger—and a girl—she had developed a habit of late of always wanting to hang around her brother.—A fact that today Anthony found quite disturbing.

"Leave me alone, Julie", he grumbled as he turned around to face her. The hurt in her soft brown eyes compelled him to add a little more gently, "I just need to be by myself for a while, okay?"

With a look of disappointment and without another word, Julie turned and ran back down the garden path. Anthony continued walking on.

Anthony groaned. "Ever since I've started organizing fun activities with the younger kids for the renewal, I haven't gotten a moment's peace. Julie never wants to leave me alone."

He came around the bend and saw Uncle Lance sitting under the tree having some Word time. Lance looked up at him with a smile.

"Hey, Anthony! How's it going?"

"Not so great."

"Want to tell me about it?" Lance pointed to a nearby stump.

Wearily, Anthony sat down and related his troubles.

"Reminds me of a story I once heard," said Lance.

* * *

A pastor was walking along the street one day on his way to a meeting. He was burdened by the cares of his job, the demands made upon him and the tasks that he was forced to undertake. Full of self-pity and gloom, he hurried onwards.

As he turned the corner, he came upon a small, lame child, who held out her hand to him for help.

"Please help me, sir! I am cold and hungry!"

"I cannot help you right now," he grumbled. "If you go to my church, you will find some food and teaching."

"But I cannot walk. How shall I get there?" questioned the child.

"Find someone to help you," the pastor growled. "I shall see you there later."

Suddenly the lame child was transformed into a beautiful angel who proclaimed, "Foolish man! You had the opportunity to show God's love to a small child and you refused it. You did not have time. Your own desires and your feeling of self-pity were more important. You have forfeited a blessing from God that could have been yours."

A verse from the Bible rang in the pastor's ears long after he left the spot: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Mat.25:40.)

The pastor came away with an understanding that no matter how good his works were, no matter how much he might try to do for others, it was all in vain if he lacked the smile and the tender look for the sad, the patient word for those in trouble, the hand held out in friendship for those who were lonely, the listening ear for those who wished to unload their troubles, and the heart of love that afforded all these things.

* * *

Anthony sat quietly thinking for a few minutes.

"I think I'm going to go find Julie and see if she would like to read with me for a while."

Key promise: Through the power of the keys of the Kingdom, I can give you the patience and the love that you need to be able to show My love to the little ones that surround you.

What to do?

It was Sunday morning, and Jared had gotten up early as usual. He wasn't able to sleep in like his brothers and sisters. *I guess I'm just an early bird*, he thought to himself. *But what to do? Last parent day I got in a whole hour of undisturbed computer game time before Dad deleted all the files, even though Dad wasn't so happy about me doing that. Now the renewal period has started, and it's really difficult for me not to be able to play computer games.*

The demon Pan and his implets were quick to enter the scene, tempting Jared in his thoughts.

This renewal period isn't going to work! Everything you like to do, you can't do anymore, they sneered. Is that fair?

Jared stopped and prayed, "Lord, please help me. I call on the keys and ask that You please show me what I should do."

At that moment of Jared's choice to pray and call on the keys, Pan and his implets turned in terror, as Illuminus appeared, vaporizing their deceptive doubts. The F.A.F. rushed in to administer conviction to Jared's spirit, strengthening him.

"Be gone, Pan, along with your minions!" cried out Illuminus, as they all disappeared into oblivion.

Unbeknownst to Jared, his hands that had been folded in prayer shot out rays in the spirit as the keys were turned to a flaming sword, silencing the devils' lying lips.

Just then Jared remembered the key his whole family had committed to memorizing for the week, which said, "As you call on the Keys of inspiration and enthusiasm, I will show you new and fun things to do that you never

thought of before, that will keep you challenged and having fun under circumstances that you never thought possible."

"Okay, Jesus, I claim the keys of inspiration and enthusiasm. Please give me an idea of something I can do that will be fun and challenging... Oh! That would be so neat, Jesus! Please help me to do that!"

* * *

A little while later baby Sara started stirring in her crib, which was the first sign that the day was starting in earnest. Mom was really tired, since Sara had been up in the night. She rolled over and asked her husband, "Could you take care of Sara, honey, and see if the other kids are up yet, so I can get a few more minutes of rest before getting up to make breakfast?"

"Of course, sweetheart," he replied with a kiss. A few minutes later Jared's dad returned with a beaming smile.

"Guess what, honey? You can sleep a little longer today. Jared is preparing a picnic breakfast for us all, and has picked out some fun stories that he would like to read for devotions."

Later that day, when Jared saw the rested and grateful look on his mom's face, he knew that he had done the right thing, and was looking forward to coming up with other ideas that would be a help to others, as well as fun for everyone.

Key Promise: The keys of conviction will help you resist temptation and help you follow the right path to happiness and joy.

Witnessing Opportunities

"I wish I had cooler witnessing opportunities," Ryan thought one afternoon while getting ready to go on a follow-up visit with his dad. "Other young people get to witness at youth clubs and hangouts and Rainbow Gatherings and all sorts of places, but we have to be so security-minded in this closed country, it's downright frustrating. I want to be a part of Holy Ghost samples on the beach, or singing the songs that made the revolution to drug addicts or something."

"Dad, it's so boring here," said Ryan continuing his complaining as they began the drive to Jun's house. "I mean, really, what are we accomplishing anyway? It takes so long to get to know people and it's such a slow process to witness to them. What if we never win any disciples? Why can't we go somewhere else where we can just tell people who we are and not worry so much about all this security stuff? Sometimes I just feel like screaming!"

"Ryan, we need to remember that this is the field the Lord called us to," his dad replied. "He told us it wouldn't be easy one. I can understand how you feel. We're used to seeing faster results coming from an open field. You want to see progress, I do too, but being on a bumper isn't going to help. There are valuable missionary qualities we are learning here—one main one being patience. Grandpa told us that patience is part of our training, and unfortunately one of our rarest virtues. It really tests our faith.

"I have an idea. Why don't you teach Jun the class this afternoon? I was going to start reading from the 'Prayer Power' *Get Activated* book with him. I'm sure you're more than capable of handling it."

"Um, I don't know, I don't think I know how to teach a class," replied Ryan. "What if he asks questions and I don't know how to answer him? Besides, I don't see how that's going to help how I feel." His dad smiled, "It's hard to explain, but there's just something about witnessing to a sheepy person one on one. It changes everything. Why don't you give it a try? Besides, you've got nothing to lose. You're frustrated because you want to do more, and this is a golden opportunity to do just that. I know it doesn't seem like what you're looking for right now, but why not at least give it a chance before you conclude it definitely isn't the answer?"

"Okay, I'll try." Ryan agreed.

"Great, Son. If you need help, I'll be right there. We can work together, so no worries on that score," encouraged his dad.

* * *

"You were right, Dad!" Ryan exclaimed the second they got back in the car to go home. "Giving a Word class is exciting. It amazed me how Jun knew so little about such a basic thing as prayer. It felt so good to be able to explain things and see him start to understand. He even asked for prayer for his parents that they would be able to understand the change that has happened to him and get saved as well! I hope you're planning to let me do this again.

Next time I want to teach him how to hear from the Lord and witness! Oh, and has he received the Holy Spirit yet?" Ryan was bubbling over with excitement.

"Sure, Son." Ryan's dad smiled. "The Family has put together Word courses that make sure our follow-up gives our sheep a good foundation. We can plan together how to we want to do it." He'd never seen his son this enthusiastic and talkative in a long time, and he praised the Lord that witnessing was coming alive for him in this closed country that was their mission field.

Key promise: The keys of hope can give you enough faith to step out and try something new, especially when you don't think it'll work.

Witnessing Prep

"Why can't you ever be ready on time?" Carol grumbled at Elsie. "We finished breakfast half an hour ago, and you've hardly got your dress on."

Quick tears came into little Elsie's eyes as she turned quickly back to her drawer to choose a pair of socks. She had been so excited about going witnessing with her older sister, but her happiness was dimmed by Carol's harsh voice.

Carol continued, "Oh, not pink socks again! Don't you have some white ones? They would look a lot better with your outfit."

Elsie quickly got out some white ones and put on her socks and shoes. "Ready," she said quietly. Carol didn't seem to notice Elsie's downcast face, and had no idea it was a result of her comments and tone. As far as she was concerned, she was just doing what she was asked and helping Elsie get ready. "Okay, let's go to the car. I have the tracts and the mags ready."

In the next room Jeremy was crawling under the bed looking for his lost shoe. Brian came cheerfully into the room with a stack of *Activated* mags in his hands. "Are you ready, Jer?" he asked, as he sat down on the bed. "I've got to get these mags straightened out. I dropped the whole stack on the way, and now they're all mixed up."

"Just finding my shoe," came Jeremy's voice. "I'll be ready in a minute."

"Wow! Look at this mag!" exclaimed Brian as he stacked them and put them in his bag. "This is the one we were reading with Dad last night. It's going to be so neat to get this one out."

"Is that the one where their boat was sinking in the Amazon?" asked Jeremy as he finally pulled out his disappeared shoe. "I like where it tells about how the mysterious boat came to help them, then disappeared!"

"Yep, that's the one! Come on, let's go.—I think everyone else is in the van."

The van headed off after prayer and claiming the keys for protection from Disruptor, and anointing for Pedro's driving and their witnessing time. They had already prayed about their destination the evening before, and it didn't take long before they had arrived at the new shopping center, which was having a grand opening day. After a final prayer for super Holy Ghost power for all of them, they clambered out of the van and headed for the main entrance.

Mariane noticed Elsie's less-than-excited face, and Carol's semi-grumbly expression, and whispered something to Pedro. He nodded and said, "Ready to split up into our teams? Mariane, Brian and Jer, why don't you head off to the north end? And our team will hit the south, okay? Then we can meet at this central door in two hours, at 12:30."

"Let's go!" Pedro smiled and headed towards a group of teens at the end of the parking lot eating free ice cream that was being given out. He whispered to Carol as they walked along, "Come on, Honey, snap out of it! We've got the greatest treasures in the universe to share with these kids. Let's not let our own spirits drag us down!"

Carol looked at him, surprised. She had no idea that her face was a reflection of her mixed emotions from this morning. She sure didn't want to fail the Lord in reaching those she met, but her mind was still filled with what had happened the evening before.

Jenny had received two new tops in from her aunt and had excitedly showed them to Carol and talked about the one she was going to wear for witnessing today. Carol was happy for her, but at the same time was eyeing the other new one, which would go perfectly with the jean skirt Carol had set out for witnessing.

I don't want to ask her if I can borrow it, because she just got it, thought Carol. But she can see too how perfect it would be.

Jenny went on with her preparations for the next day, unaware of Carol's thoughts, and eventually they both headed into bed. In the morning, Carol still hoped Jen would offer her the top, but she didn't, so she had gone into Elsie's room to help get her ready for the day.

"Oh, Pedro, I'm sorry," she whispered back. "I need some more key-powered prayers. I was so full of myself that I didn't really enter in to the prayer this morning."

Pedro and Elsie stopped for a minute while Carol poured out her heart to the Lord and asked for forgiveness and key power to witness.

"The keys will give you power to preach the Gospel," added Elsie, smiling.

"Here, Elsie, would you like to put these new tracts in your pouch?" said Carol cheerfully as they continued on their way. "I sure do enjoy going witnessing with you!"

Key Promises:

If you call on the power of the keys for Me to control your feelings and emotions, I will do it.

The keys can change your mindset, and give you a totally positive and praiseful mindset.

The keys of the Kingdom can change your spirit, your mind, and your thoughts, so that you're in My Spirit, using My mind, and thinking My thoughts. The more you call on the keys of total possession by Me, the more they will be activated, and the more you will experience the changes you desire.

Xerus "Racket"

Xerus was commander of a sleek spaceship, part of the great Trans-Galactic Fleet (TGF) of elite fighter spaceships commissioned to guard the Homeland. The TGF doubled as a troop of scouts who searched for potential planets and peoples who could join the resistance against the invading Ilkists who sought to plague the Homeland and its territories.

Xerus' vessel was brand new when he'd received command of it, and he was proud of the many proclamations of its power and unprecedented capabilities. Of such were its extreme speed, maneuverability, and silence. It was among a fleet of such highly acclaimed elite vessels. Xerus had been instructed in the ways of the ancients—the ways of the wise and the learned.

One day while in his quarters, Xerus had been analyzing the latest upgrades and renovations available for his ship. *I've always welcomed these types of upgrades in the past*, Xerus thought, *but I'd venture to say that my crew could find more attractive upgrades to pull us away from the somewhat "sameness" of the other spaceships in this fleet.*

The TGF often encountered skirmishes with the Ilkists, but the prestige of the TGF always came to the fore, thanks to the frequent upgrades from HQ. However, if a TGF vessel did not receive the necessary upgrades, it was more susceptible to the Ilkists' firepower, which was frequently upgraded to try and counter the TGF's abilities. Xerus had been taught this at the training academy, but felt his skill and knowledge of the Ilkists' tactics, weaponry, and battle plans was more than adequate experience for his personal renovations.

Over the next days and weeks, notifications came from HQ enquiring as to why the upgrades had not been made, to which Xerus would always reply, "We're working on it!"

"The first thing we will do," Captain Xerus announced to his crew, "is to decorate the exterior of our vessel. At our last stop on the planet Nerodil, I encountered just the elements needed to enhance our vessel's features."

After months of work, Captain Xerus and crew had completed their handiwork—a vessel trendier than all others in the fleet, they proclaimed.

Before long this fad had passed throughout the TGF ranks and other ships began to imitate Xerus' upgrades, adding their own flare.

Alas, one thing that Xerus had not paid much attention to was the lack of skill he and his crew seemed to have in their battles against the Ilkists. If it had not been for the other vessels in the TGF, Xerus would likely have been brutally attacked and beaten by the Ilkists. They, along with others, were rapidly becoming a threat to the security of TGF.

"Captain Xerus!" the voice of the top general of TGF could be heard over the loudspeaker. "I'm afraid to inform you that your vessel has become a threat to the security of TGF! The gaudy colors and new outer shields you've placed on her exterior have inhibited the cloaking device, making you a target of the Ilkists. The trail of trinkets you've attached to your ship have made her a racket of noise, that once again attracts the attention of the Ilkists to our fleet. And your failure to upgrade with HQ's latest technology has made your vessel ineffective in its ability to fight the Ilkists, and has put you and your crew in danger."

The general continued: "This trend has become rampant throughout TGF, and in light of this we will need to take your vessel and the others in for repairs. In fact, we will be performing a more complete upgrade on all our vessels over the next period of time. But I'm afraid that your vessel, and others like yours, will require a little more work and care. All captains will be reentered into the academy for further training and a reminder of their calling and responsibilities as captains of vessels within the TGF."

This news was difficult for Xerus to hear, and as his vessel made its way to the docks of Homeland, he felt disappointed about this refurbishing and retraining time. However, within time, having reentered the academy, there was much that Xerus had forgotten in his original training, parts of the Captain's Manual that he'd forgotten about which he soon found great interest in. In time, Xerus concluded that this time was the best thing that could've ever happened to him. In the end his ship was once again among the elitist, an Ilkist blaster ever eager for HQ's latest downloads.

In thinking back, Captain Xerus would laugh at the gaudy trinkets that had earned him his nickname "Racket," and was glad that those elements were no longer a part of his life. He was a skilled, determined warrior once again, and his ship was an ever-present threat to any Ilkist territory or ship.

Key promises:

Every challenge to change is your helper; it moves you to depend on the keys. Nothing is too hard if you call on the keys. The secret to change is calling on the keys.

The keys enable you to have a complete transformation.