

**foundations[®]
for Kidz!**



20 Day Devotional for KIDS!

Lessons on knowing God!



**SOUTHLAND
CHURCH**

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

Welcome to...

foundations[®] for Kidz!

Dear Parents,

The short booklet you hold in your hands is a devotional tool that we hope will help your children to connect with Jesus and develop a regular devotional walk with Him. These devotions are based on stories called "The Animal Underground" which follow Ravi Raccoon and his friends on many adventures. Each week there will be five days' worth of devotions; the first day is always a story followed by 4 days of activities to reinforce the message.

Our desire is that elementary school children of all ages will *enjoy* the booklet and grow to enjoy spending time in the Word, in prayer and with Jesus! Our desire is that, for the younger kids (grades K-2) the stories help create a meaningful family time, and that if your kids are bit older (grades 3-4) they will be able to do the reading and activities on their own as they grow increasingly responsible for their personal walk with Jesus.

In Him,



Thom Dick
Pastor of Resource Development
Southland Church

We welcome any ideas you have to make *Foundations for Kidz* better. If you want to offer some feedback or have questions about how to use *Foundations for Kidz* effectively talk to the pastor in your child's ministry area or email Pastor Thom Dick at thom@mysouthland.com.

Foundations for Kidz is also available for download at www.therenewedfamily.com.

A message from Ravi Raccoon!

Hey Kids!

My name is Ravi Raccoon and I am looking forward to telling you some of the amazing adventures that I have had with my crazy friends! I hope that as you read these stories you will learn lessons about Creator-God and you will also avoid making some of the silly mistakes that my friends and I made growing up. But MOST of all...I hope that our stories help you meet with Jesus! Jesus is my friend and I have come to love Him so much! He is the most important person in the world and He has a special plan for your life!

We are going to write a booklet like this every month and inside you will find there is one story and four activities you can do every week. Try them all! The story you read is an adventure with ME! And after that, come four more days of activities you can do to grow closer to Jesus. If you miss a day, don't worry, you can do it on the next day! Remember it's all about getting to know Jesus!

If you want to *read* more stories or *listen* to some of my adventures, your parents can download them at www.therenewedfamily.com. And if you EVER have a question about God that you want to ask someone, ask your parents to help you email me, at RRaccoon@mysouthland.com and I will be sure to email you back!

In Him,

R. Raccoon 

Ravi Raccoon



Memory Verse

*Yes, everything else is
worthless when compared
with the infinite value of
knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Philippians 3:8 (NLT)

Day 1

Not far from here at the end of a dusty road is an old country farm. In almost every way it's a regular farm with animals, gardens, barns and fields; owned by a mean old man named Willy Walters. Lying beyond the farm is a pasture, and beyond the pasture is a fence, and that fence is the boundary between the human world of fields and farms and the animal world of the forest.

If you were to go through the pasture and over the fence into the forest you would find yourself walking into a very different world! It's not that the trees are so different, or the rocks and boulders are different, or the moss or creeks or smells or sounds are all that different from what you would expect, but the animals, well they are just a little bit different. Because this forest world, is the world of the Animal Underground!



It had been a long, hot summer. Longer, it seemed to Calvin, than any other summer he could remember, hotter too. It didn't help that he wore a fur coat year round. Calvin daydreamed about the lazy days, the days spent swimming in Cottonwood Creek and catching fish with his friends. The forest had been pretty quiet too, the hunters seemed to have all but vanished. It had been quite peaceful, quite peaceful indeed.

A wistful smile crossed Calvin's face as he thought about all this. But almost as quickly as his daydreams had started, a dark cloud crossed his mind and a chill ran up his spine. A feeling of guilt cut through his summer memories. *Here we go again*, Calvin thought, *I wish I could stop feeling this way.*

The way Calvin was feeling now began shortly after summer started to get hot and the forest began to quiet down. With fewer and fewer missions to go on there was more leisure time. But a feeling of guilt always seemed to hang around Calvin's head because, as the forest quieted down, the Animal Underground had less and less to do. Calvin, as the leader of the group, felt like he was letting the gang down somehow by not finding missions for them to go on. He kept telling himself that a peaceful forest was far better, but he still felt like he was letting the others down somehow.

All these mixed emotions were happening as Calvin plodded along in the heat. He was on his way to meet Ravi, Luther, Wil, Milton and Cassie...yes, *Cassie!* Calvin shook his fur in disbelief. Ravi had invited his sister, Cassie Cougar,

to join the Animal Underground early in the summer. “Yuck, girls!” Calvin muttered to himself.

His mind turned again to the guilty feeling inside. “I just gotta show the group that I am a good leader,” he kept telling himself.

“Hey Calvin!” A tiny, but shrill voice interrupted his thoughts. Calvin didn’t look around, he didn’t have to. “Hey Milt,” he said simply.

“Sorry I was a little late leaving, I had a few chores to finish up, but I’m glad I managed to catch up to you.” Milton looked up at him as he matched Calvin’s pace, “You think you could pick up the pace a little?”

Calvin shrugged and just said, “I guess I’ve had a lot on my mind – just been going a little slower so I can think stuff through.”

“Well, Ravi’s got a mission for us all, and I think it’s going to be a big one! After this *boring* summer, I am so ready for a little excitement!”

Calvin had already figured out that this was going to be one of their bigger missions since Pa Cougar had sent him to meet Ravi with a big bag of food slung across his back, a big hug and instructions to be safe and to “see you in a few days.”

They walked that way for a while...Calvin lost in thought and only occasionally acknowledging Milton while Milton rambled on excitedly about the many fantastic adventures that they were sure to have.

After about another hour of this, they came to the south side of the ravine. They turned to follow the edge and headed west. By this time, Milton had grown tired of scurrying beside Calvin and he had climbed onto his back and settled down on the thick fur. Milton’s tiredness from the journey and the soft, thick fur made it very inviting for him to drift off to sleep, lulled by the rocking motion of Calvin’s shoulders walking at a rhythmic pace. Calvin was very grateful for the silence as Milton had been talking his ear off for the last hour.

All of a sudden Calvin stopped and the fur on his neck bristled, poking Milton in the face. Milton sat straight up and looked around.

“Do you feel that?” Calvin whispered, half turning his head to try to see Milton.

Milton, quickly becoming alert to his surroundings sensed it too. “Yes,” he replied, “there’s someone or *something* in the trees.”

Quick as a bolt of lightning, Milton was off Calvin’s back and zipping like a tiny arrow across the path and into the trees, “Milton!” Calvin yelled, caught off guard by his sudden action. Calvin hesitated, not sure whether or not to go into the forest after him. “You’re some leader,” Calvin muttered to himself, “letting the little guy take the danger head on!”

While Calvin was mentally beating himself up, his thoughts were interrupted by a sudden squeal of fear from the trees where Milton had disappeared. Instantly, without even thinking, Calvin sprang to life and plowed headlong into the undergrowth. Within seconds Calvin burst into a mini clearing in the trees to see Milton, caught by his tail under the foot of a full grown fox. Immediately a roar escaped from Calvin's throat, catching the fox by surprised as he barreled into the fox with the ferocity of a rabid dog. "NO ONE TOUCHES MY FRIEND!" he roared as the two of them tumbled and rolled across the clearing.

Without warning 3 more foxes seemed to come out of nowhere and were on Calvin, biting, nipping and clawing at him. Calvin went wild and fought back. Even though the full grown foxes were nearly Calvin's size, Calvin was much heavier and somewhat stronger. Very soon the foxes realized they were outmatched and quickly disappeared into the trees, leaving Calvin panting and pacing around, frantically searching the trees for more attackers and for Milton. His eyes saw him scurrying across the clearing towards him, his small, black, beady eyes appearing extra big with the fright on his face.

Milton pounced onto Calvin's back and fiercely dug into his fur with his claws. Milton just clung on and panted. Calvin asked him, "Are you OK, Milt?" Milton just nodded yes. Calvin just breathed heavily for a few minutes, collecting his thoughts, wondering what had just happened. Finally, he repeated his thoughts out loud, "What just happened?" Both boys just couldn't figure it out. Finally, Calvin turned and headed towards the main path, unsure of what else to do.

Calvin was lost in his thoughts, fuming with anger at those foxes who would dare attack Milton, and then him!? Ravi would definitely hear about this! Then the thought hit him: *he should have gone after those foxes!* Calvin was kicking himself inside. *That's what a true leader would have done!* A low growl escaped from his throat. Calvin almost wished he would see one of them so he could capture him and teach him a lesson. *They would learn never to mess with someone from the Animal Underground, especially the LEADER of it!*

What do you think?

Calvin has been struggling with what it means to be a true leader. What do you think a true leader would do in Calvin's situation?

Day 2

Read: Genesis 1-2:10

Summary: the Israelites were in slavery, *horrible* slavery! The Egyptian king hated the Israelites and was actually afraid of them because there were so many of them. He thought that if the Israelites ever figured out how strong they were, they might fight against the Egyptians and leave the country. So the king hatched a terrible plan to kill all the new baby boys born to the Israelites. Yikes! One particular mother had a baby boy and tried to hide him from Egyptian soldiers, but eventually he just got too big and too loud to hide. She made a basket and set the boy afloat in the Nile River, where the princess found him and decided to raise him as her own son. This princess named him Moses and Moses grew up in the king's own house. Eventually Moses learned that he wasn't actually an Egyptian, but was an Israelite, just like the slaves.

Questions to ponder / discussion questions (choose one of the following)

- Imagine growing up in the king's palace in the most powerful country in the whole world! It would be a little like being the son of the Prime Minister of the Canada. What kinds of things would you like to do?
- How would you feel as a prince in the king's palace knowing that your own people were ruthlessly beaten and in slavery? How would you feel? What do you think you would do?

Day 3

What does it mean to be a true leader? By becoming the kind of person you want your followers to be! Do you want your followers to be kind? Then be kind! Do you want your followers to serve? Then serve others!

Get your mom or dad to find a picture or a drawing that you can trace. It must be on a single sheet of paper that can be taped onto a window.

Step 1: Take a blank piece of paper and try really, really hard to draw a copy of the picture just by looking at it – **no tracing it out!**

Step 2: Now take the original picture and ask your mom or dad to help you tape it to a window. Now put a new, blank piece of paper over top and trace the picture.

What do you think? Which one is the more realistic copy? Probably the traced one!

Now think about it for a moment: when you try to follow Jesus, it's hard to live so your life copies His. But the closer you get to Him and the more you let God's light shine on you (like the traced picture on the window), the more like Jesus you will look like. And Jesus is the BEST leader of all – so we need to copy Him!

Day 4

Read the short Bible story in Luke 10:38-42 and then ask God the following question and spend a moment in silence listening for what He has to say to you. Write or draw what He shows you.

Prayer: “Dear Jesus, in what way did you meet with me this week?”

Day 5

Work on memorizing Philippians 3:8 (NLT) *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Day 6

Milton and Calvin travelled together for about another hour, not saying a whole lot to each other. Calvin was still silently fuming about those foxes that would dare attack his friend.

Finally, they came to a place where the ravine walls began to get lower and lower, so as they skirted the edge of the ravine they knew they would soon be able to just simply walk across to the other side.

“Looks like we will be meeting Ravi and the gang soon,” Calvin said.

Milton just nodded. Something had caught his eyes across the ravine in the forest on the other side. The angle of the late afternoon sun created longer shadows in their side of the forest, but it pierced through into the forest on the other side, allowing a clear view. Calvin stopped and looked over, he had seen it too...a flash of orange. *Could it be...?* Calvin wondered. He knew that whatever it was, it could not have seen them since they were in the shadows.

“Did you see that?” Calvin said in hushed tones.

Milton nodded, "I think that was one of the foxes that attacked me..." his voice trailed off.

Suddenly Calvin was shaking his shoulders, trying to get Milton off. "Milton, hop off, there's something I need to check out real quick." Milton looked questioningly at Calvin, but scurried down and off his back. Calvin looked back at Milton and said, "Stay hidden, I'll be back shortly."

Milton opened his mouth to protest, but before a sound could come out, Calvin was already 20 feet away zipping towards the other side of the ravine. He hoped and prayed that Calvin wouldn't do something foolish as he backed into a small bush that sat at the base of a tree overlooking the ravine. Milton felt very safe and comfortable hiding under that bush. His spot afforded him a clear view up and down the ravine in either direction. He saw Calvin dash up the small, rocky ledge on the opposite side of the ravine and into the trees. Even though the sun shone directly into the trees on the other side of the ravine, Milton was surprised at how quickly Calvin could disappear into them, almost as if he were invisible.

The minutes seemed to pass like hours for Milton, but in reality, it was only about four or five minutes before he heard it, the sound of rustling and snapping branches. He perked up his head and scanned the ravine for the source of the sound. It wasn't long before he heard what sounded like frantic clawing and branches snapping...then, suddenly, a high pitched yell came from about a hundred yards further up the ravine. The bush shook and then an orangey red animal came plunging down into the ravine and landed with a "THUD"! It caught Milton by surprise, but not so surprised that he didn't see that face peeking out from the bushes across the way on top of the ravine from where the animal tumbled out. "Calvin!" Milton said in surprise and shock. Calvin's face looked down at the animal, then slowly to the left and the right, almost as if he were checking to see if anyone had noticed. Then, just as quickly, Calvin vanished into the bushes.

Milton watched the orangey red animal. He realized that it was a fox. He wondered if the fox was alright and contemplated scurrying down into the ravine to see if he could help. Then, with what appeared to be slow and painful movements, the fox got on all fours, shook its fur, and then hobbled off into the distance as fast as it could.

Milton wondered about all of this for a few moments, then returned to his hiding spot in the bush. Milton was so deep in thought about all of this that he didn't notice Calvin approaching and nearly jumped out of his skin when all of a sudden Calvin's nose was pushing into the bushes just above him.

“Calvin!” Milton squeaked. “You nearly scared me half to death!”

“Sorry,” he replied.

“What did you run off to do?” Milton asked, although he had a sneaking suspicion he knew what had all just happened.

Calvin averted his eyes from Milton’s piercing, beady black gaze and cleared his throat. “Uhh...I just had to check something out. Turns out it was nothing,” he lied.

“Uh huh,” Milton muttered. He climbed back onto Calvin’s back. Silently the pair kept moving. Milton didn’t want to say anything just yet...he wasn’t exactly sure just *what* to say. The words he wanted to speak, however, burned like a hot coal in his chest. Finally it was just too much and he piped up, “Calvin, I saw what happened on the ravine. I saw that fox,” he could feel Calvin tense up as he spoke, “I think I know what you did, you wanted to get back at that fox!”

Calvin suddenly stopped and shook Milton off his back and whipped around and glared at him. He turned suddenly angry and spoke defensively, “I did that to protect YOU, Milton! Those foxes needed to learn a lesson, who knows if they would have come back again? Now they will think twice!”

“Calvin, you could have killed that fox! Yeah, they were bugging me back there, but I don’t know if they were just having fun at my expense or trying to eat me – but you saved me and *that was enough!* You didn’t need to go hunting them down too!”

Milton’s words stung, he was right, he could have killed that fox. Calvin felt a stab of guilt in his gut, but then Calvin’s pride got in the way and he got defensive, “Oh yeah? Some friend you are! I risked my neck to save you and now went out of my way to make sure you were going to stay safe and now you are nitpicking how I’m trying to do it? Besides, I *didn’t* kill that fox!” Calvin was yelling now. A hot tear ran down his cheek, quickly he turned his head and wiped it away.

Milton stamped his feet in anger, which was actually kind of amusing as it looked like someone pounding toothpicks into the ground. He turned around and stomped off down the path while he squeaked out, “Fine! Have it your way, Calvin, I know what I saw, I know what you did. I’m not going to try discussing it with you – I will let Ravi do that!”

Calvin felt frozen to the ground. The thought stopped him in his tracks...*Ravi? He was going to have to discuss this with Ravi?* He suddenly felt weak in the knees and a wave of dizziness swept over him. *Maybe they are better off without me,* Calvin thought.

Calvin backed away from Milton, slowly at first, then he turned and disappeared down the path they had just travelled down. As he ran away, back up Mount Guardian, his hot tears flowed freely now. *What have I done?* Calvin thought. *How can I ever show my face around the gang again, especially Ravi?*

What do you think?

Choosing to do things our own way can be very bad! It looks like Calvin might be about to figure that out the hard way. He wanted to get revenge, but also, he wanted to prove that he could take care of things as the group's leader.

Can you think of a time that you thought you knew better than your parents?

Day 7

Read: Genesis 2:11-25

Summary: Moses had had a comfortable life, growing up in the palace, but he knew who his people were. He knew that he was an Israelite. He felt sorry for them that they were forced to work so very hard! He wondered what he could do to help. One day he thought he had his chance when he came to the rescue of an Israelite being beaten by an Egyptian. He was so angry that he barged right in there and killed the Egyptian! But of course, he was afraid that the king might hear about what he did, so he buried the Egyptian's body in the sand before anyone could notice.

But sure enough, the king *did* find out, and boy, was he mad! Moses ran for his life into the desert, eventually finding a nice family that he could stay with and work for to pay for his room and board. Moses was far away from his people for many years – but God did not forget. God remembered where Moses was and He remembered the slavery that the Israelites were in.

Questions to ponder / discussion questions (choose one of the following)

- Have you ever done something bad that you tried to hide? What happened? Did you get away with it, or did someone find out?
- How long do you think Moses should have waited before deciding it might be safe to return to the palace? Or do you think it would ever be safe for Moses again at the palace?

Day 8

Today you will need to get a balloon, scotch tape and a needle and a parent to help you. Blow up the balloon and pinch the end so it won't deflate. Now, take a piece of tape and put it on the surface of the balloon.

What do you think will happen if you poke a hole through the tape into the balloon? Discuss it with your parents. Now try it – was it what you expected?

As Christians, when we choose to sin, it's like poking a needle into the balloon, it starts to let God's power out of our lives. Eventually, if we don't come to God and get it fixed, we will be like an empty balloon.

But when we confess our sin to God and to others and decide to follow God again, it's a little like taking another piece of tape and fixing the hole (do so now). Now blow air into it again.

Day 9

Read 1 John 1:9 and then ask God the following question and spend a moment in silence listening for what He has to say to you. Write or draw what He shows you. Then go and confess your sin to the person you did wrong to.

Prayer: "Dear Jesus, I confess that I don't always listen to You or my mom & dad. Please show me if there is any sin that I should say sorry to someone for."

Day 10

Work on memorizing Philippians 3:8 (NLT) *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Day 11

Calvin ran far enough to make sure that Milton would not be able to follow him and then slowed to a walk. Finally he stopped, heaved with a great sigh and then lay down at the base of a great oak tree. The tears had stopped running from his eyes, but he felt as if they could start up again at any moment. His head sunk down to his paws and he stared blankly ahead. By now the sun had

sunk very low and the evening light was just beginning to fade. He knew that Milton would have reached the rest of the gang by now. Would they go out in search of him? Probably not, it was getting too late, they would likely start out in the morning.

Finally, exhausted by his guilt and the long day's travels. Calvin fell fast asleep...

...and was jerked awake by a strange noise. He was a little disoriented in the dark forest. *Where am I? What am I doing here?* Slowly it dawned on him what had happened. Calvin, stood to his feet, wondering what it was that had awakened him. He looked around, silver moonlight filtered through leaves lighting up the ground all around. The nearly full moon was high in the sky, which told Calvin it was the middle of the night.

Slowly he stepped back onto the pathway. He shook his fur as if to shake loose the last bit of sleep that was hanging on to him. A strange, yellowish light seemed to glow further down the path. *Odd*, Calvin thought. Puzzled, he followed the light to see what was causing it.

The light seemed to be cast from just around the next bend in the path. As he turned the path, he looked up to see what the light was, but only saw more path ahead of him. The light seemed to move further back and appeared to be coming from around another bend further up the path. Calvin began to run a little quicker to get to this strange sight. Yet, when he turned the path, he saw the same thing again – no light source, just a glow coming from around an upcoming bend in the path. Frustrated by this moving glow, Calvin started running full bore towards the light, as if to catch up to it. Yet over and over again, there it was, a glow cast further up the path.

Finally, frustrated, Calvin came to a stop. He kept looking at the glow down the path and cocked his head to the side. With a sigh, Calvin flopped down on the ground, exhausted from lack of sleep. Calvin looked up into the night sky and muttered out loud, half to himself, half to the Creator, "I don't know what You're trying to do – and whatever it is, I probably deserve it, but can I have a little help here?"

As if in answer to his question, he felt a strong desire to get up and walk to the end of the path and look towards the glow one last time. Calvin walked cautiously forward, eventually reaching the turn in the path. When he turned towards the glow, the sight took his breath away. A tree stood in front of him in the middle of a large clearing, bathed in the silver moonlight, but there appeared to be wisps of flames throughout the leaves on the tree, almost as if

the tree were on fire – but not quite. When Calvin later tried describing it, he couldn't find the right words. The whole area seemed, well, holy.

“Calvin.”

Calvin looked up. Beside the tree stood a Man. Oddly enough the Man did not seem to be silhouetted against the brightness of the tree, rather, it seemed that the tree drew its light from the Man Himself.

The voice came again, “Calvin.”

Calvin put his head down, he couldn't bear to look this Man in the face, it was too much.

Again it came, strong, sweet and steady, “Calvin.”

Calvin barely squeaked out a simple, “Y-Yes.”

“Remember this place,” as He said that, Calvin slowly peeked one eye open and looked up briefly.

“Remember this place,” the Man repeated. “You will meet Me here.”

Calvin shut his eyes tightly again, overwhelmed by the sights he saw. *I will meet Him here? What does He mean? I am already here, I am already meeting Him!*

Suddenly, the light that was shining through his closed eyelids disappeared. He slowly peeked them open to look, and was surprised to discover that he was laying under the great oak tree where his strange night journey had started. It dawned on Calvin that everything he had just seen was all part of a dream. It was now just before dawn and the sky was beginning to herald the approaching sun. Cautiously he stood up and looked down the path he had travelled in his dreams. It was still dark enough out that he would see if there was any light shining on the path up ahead, but he saw nothing.

Remember this place, the thought came to mind again. Calvin shook himself, *I must be going crazy*, he thought.

But try as he might, he couldn't put that dream out of his mind. What if it meant something? Is it possible I will actually meet Him there? Could I find my way back to that burning tree? He got up and ran over to the next bend in the path.

The details of the dream were already starting to fade in his mind. He thought he remembered the first couple of turns in the path, but after that the trail branched into multiple paths at every turn. He started to wonder if he could retrace the steps he made in the dream, if indeed this was the same path. Calvin sat down to think, but the harder he thought, the more confused he became. Now he was second-guessing the turns he had already made. Besides

all that, the sun was starting to come up, making the landscape very bright and it looked very different in the light than the fading memory of a night's journey.

Finally, frustrated, Calvin flopped down beside the path. *Why would God give me a dream like that?* He wondered. He sighed, sat up on his hind legs and looked into the sky above. "Hey, God, uh...I'm not sure if You gave me that dream last night. But the Man in the dream said 'Remember this place,' and I am trying, but, uh, the dream is getting hard to remember. If that really was You and You really want me to find that tree, can You help me somehow?" Calvin waited in the silence. It almost seemed like the birds were listening for God's response to Calvin's prayer too as the forest got a little bit quieter, or so it seemed. A small breeze rustled the leaves around him and then died down. Calvin looked around carefully for any sign of an answer, his ears perked up with every small noise in the undergrowth around him. Finally, he slouched in resignation and muttered, "Figures."

Then, out of the corner of his eye, Calvin saw a yellow glow. *No way!* He thought. He looked over and saw what looked a little bit like dancing light at the bend in the path up ahead. With a yelp of joy, Calvin went bounding towards it, only to discover a handful of small, yellow butterflies dancing and fluttering on the path. The butterflies scattered at his approach and disappeared into the trees. Calvin scrunched up his face, confused, and looked around. All at once he caught a glimpse of the same dancing 'light' on the new section of path way ahead where the path branched. "I wonder," Calvin whispered. "Could it be...?" Calvin ran down the path and the same thing happened again, a small swarm of yellow butterflies scattered at his approach – but not before he could figure out the next branch in the path.

"Hmmm," was all Calvin said.

Turn after turn, Calvin discovered the same thing, yellow butterflies that scattered at his approach. At one point he looked down some of the other trails, but he never saw any other butterfly swarms in any other paths. Very soon the turns seemed to become vaguely familiar, almost as if he had seen them in a dream somewhere.

Then, after turning the last corner, he saw it, a magnificent tree standing alone in the middle of a clearing. Calvin's mouth hung open in amazement, partially because the dream had come true, but also because the tree was on fire! Or...at least it looked like it at first glance. Calvin cautiously approached the tree. The wisps of flames seemed to have an otherworldly appearance, not quite like the flames you would see in a camp fire, but when you looked at a tree as a whole, it looked remarkably like it was burning up. As Calvin drew

nearer, he realized that it wasn't fire at all, but swarms and swarms of yellow butterflies dancing and fluttering around in many small groups that gave the appearance of yellow fire.

Calvin laughed at the wonder of it all. He bounded closer and all at once a huge mushroom cloud of butterflies rolled upwards from the tree and dispersed in the mid-morning breeze. Just like that, he was standing there alone in front of the tree.

"Uh...hello?" Calvin spoke. He remembered the Man saying, "You will meet Me here."

Smack! Calvin jumped back, surprised by a shot of pain to his right ear. Something had struck him. Calvin frantically looked around to see what it was. *Zing!* Another shot of pain, this time to his back paw. Calvin stumbled backwards. *Whack! Bang! Zing!* One following another, three more shots of pain struck him in his head, neck and back. Calvin clumsily stumbled to the relative shelter underneath the main tree in the clearing, a bit dazed and disoriented.

As he pressed tight against the tree trunk his eyes scanned the clearing where he had just been standing. Small, round, brown objects littered the place where he had been standing. He wanted to move a little closer to have a look, but was afraid to face whatever it was that was out there. *Pow!* Calvin yelped loudly from the pain that came from behind. He whirled around and growled, as if to tell whatever it was that was out there that he wasn't one to be messed with. One, two, three, four more objects pelted him from above. *He wasn't safe anywhere!* Frantically he dashed around the clearing while trying to scan the trees. *Maybe if I keep moving I will be safe!* Calvin thought.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! Five of them! He didn't even see them coming – all five hit him in the head and Calvin collapsed, curling into a ball. "Ouch!" Calvin yelled. "Whoever you are, stop it!" He hesitated and then said, "Please!"

"Allo, cub." Calvin opened his eyes and there, standing in front of him was an old, squirrel with a crazy look in his eyes. He was holding an acorn in his paw. It was Jakob!

What do you think?

Do you think God had a plan for Calvin and wanted to be with him, even after what he had done to the fox? What makes you think that?

Day 12

Read: Exodus 3

Summary: Moses was far away from Egypt in the land of Midian. In fact, he had been gone for 40 years already! That's a long time. But God was at work in training Moses. Finally, it was time – and God had a special surprise planned. He appeared to Moses in a burning bush, which didn't burn up even though it was on fire! God had a special message for Moses. In addition to the special message, God wanted Moses to know that He would be with him and would help him. Even though Moses had done some bad things, God still had a big plan for his life.

Questions to ponder / discussion questions (choose one of the following)

- If God appeared to you like He appeared to Moses (and to Calvin in his dream), what would you wish He would talk to you about?
- Moses waited 40 years in the desert tending sheep. He was 80 years old when God spoke to him in the burning bush and gave him his mission! Have you ever had to wait for something big for a very long time? What was it?

Day 13

Have a race with a brother or sister, or your mom or dad. Start out far away from each other (maybe at the end of a street or other side of a school yard). When you yell "GO!" both of you race towards each other as fast as you can! Where do you end up? Did you meet in the middle? Who was faster? Try starting out at different places and see where you end up.

When you are done, discuss how God wants to be with us way more than we want to be with Him. It's kind of like Him running towards us as fast as He can!

Day 14

Read Isaiah 43:1-4...even in difficult times, God loves us and has promised to be with us. Journal God's response to the following question.

Prayer: "God, how much do You love me?"

If you don't seem to get anything, don't worry, just trust that God loves you way, way more than you could ever imagine!

Day 15

Work on memorizing Philippians 3:8 (NLT) *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Day 16

"Uh...Jakob...?"

"What's the matter, cub?"

Calvin stumbled back from Jakob, now VERY confused and a little dazed from being pelted with acorns all over. Warily, Calvin stood a little ways from the squirrel.

"What's the matter cub? Squirrel got your tongue?" Jakob chattered in a typical squirrel like laugh.

"Uh...uh, was that, uh, was that you throwing acorns at me?" Calvin asked, nodding to the acorn he held in his paw.

Jakob scurried directly between Calvin's paws, causing Calvin to tense up, unsure of what he was going to do with the acorn. Jakob pointed at the ground and said, "Lie down."

Calvin did so, you don't mess with crazy squirrels, especially not Jakob. Jakob was now eye level with Calvin. "How does it feel?" Jakob asked.

"What?" Calvin stammered. What kind of question was that? "How does *what* feel?"

"To be outwitted, outmatched and helpless."

Calvin sputtered, "Helpless?! Ha! I can look after myself just fine, thank you!"

Smack! Calvin yelped as the acorn Jakob was holding bounced off his nose.

"Hey!" Calvin yelled.

Jakob just stood there, cocked his head to one side and said, "Do I need to prove my point again?" He bounced another acorn in his other paw, ready to throw it.

"OK, fine! Point proven!" Calvin said defensively. After a moment he calmed down and then muttered, "It didn't feel very good." Jakob just looked at him, as if he knew that Calvin wanted to ask a question. "OK, why are you here? Why were you throwing acorns at me?" Calvin shuffled back a little so he wasn't nose to nose with Jakob.

Jakob replied, “The Creator told me to come here. He said to me, ‘Someone will arrive that needs My help.’ Then He gave me the crazy idea to pelt you with acorns until you asked me to stop,” Jakob paused for a moment, twitched his tail a few times, then leaned in to Calvin’s ear and whispered, “It even seemed crazy to *me*, a crazy old squirrel. But hey, what God wants, God gets, eh?”

Calvin leaned his head away from Jakob, partially because he was hard to see so close and partially because he was shocked by what he heard. “God asked you to hit me with acorns? But, but...why?” Calvin stammered.

Jakob backed up a few hops, “Think, cub! My guess is He has already been talking to you about something, huh?” Jakob chattered a squirrel chuckle and zipped up the tree, leaving Calvin alone with his thoughts.

Hmmm, Calvin thought to himself, *why indeed?* Then he remembered how he was feeling on the journey with Milton, like he was letting the group down by not finding missions to do. As he thought of that, his mind turned to the fox attack and he started to get angry again. But then he remembered how he hunted down one of the foxes and attacked him. A familiar feeling of guilt washed over him, *I could have really hurt that fox!* Calvin thought. *I never even gave him a chance. I was so busy feeling angry about what happened to Milton and sorry for myself!* As Calvin dwelled further on that thought, he felt worse and worse. A large tear rolled down his cheek. Calvin collapsed to the ground again and more tears welled up in his eyes. He looked up at the sky and through tearful sobs, called out, “Oh, Creator! I am so sorry. I was a bully. I didn’t even stop to talk to You about it! I just let my anger boil inside. Oh God, please let that fox be OK. Please protect Milton! I just abandoned him! I was so busy trying to prove myself as a leader and protector that I forgot that without You I can’t do anything!” As he called out, the tears rolled down quickly and easily down his cheeks.

Then Calvin felt a small paw on his nose. He looked up and saw Jakob standing in front of him with a tender look in his eyes. Calvin sucked in his breath through quiet sobs. “Jakob, I see it. Thank you,” Calvin proceeded to tell the squirrel the whole story from beginning to end. As he recounted how he attacked the helpless fox, Calvin sobbed fresh tears all over again. Through misty eyes, he looked at Jakob and said, “I see why God asked you to throw acorns at me! I needed to be reminded how it feels to be helpless and attacked by something I don’t have the power to defend myself against.”

After a few moments, his tears slowed down and he was able to gather his thoughts together. The whole time, Jakob just sat there, watching Calvin. Calvin just knew in his heart that Jakob had been praying intensely while he waited;

and though he did not see Jakob's mouth move, he could see it in his eyes. "I guess I'm not really cut out to be a leader," Calvin said, finally. "I don't know how God could trust me with that."

Jakob stepped back and pointed a claw at Calvin, "God led you here. You admitted that yourself. The very fact that He has taken the time to teach you a lesson means He wants you to learn and grow and it PROVES that He loves you. If you stop getting hard lessons from God, *then* I would start to be concerned."

Jakob started to bound away into the forest. As he was crossing the clearing he called back, "Don't quit on God, cub. You know what you need to do."

Calvin bolted to his feet, concerned. "Wait! Jakob, the Creator said He was going to meet me here! How long should I wait?"

Jakob stopped, looked back and laughed a chirruping laugh, "Who says He hasn't?" With that he dashed into the forest.

Calvin thought about it. *I guess He did meet me here*, Calvin thought to himself. With that, he knew what he needed to do. He turned and ran back down the path; Ravi, Milton and the gang would be looking for him, and boy, did he have a story to tell them!

What do you think?

Often, the only thing stopping us from having a good friendship or relationship with someone is ourselves! Calvin ran away from Milton, but he could have confessed his sin and stayed where he was – so Calvin blocked a good relationship.

Are there any relationship (parent, sibling, friend) that you are blocking from being good? Ask Jesus, confess what He shows you and then make it right.

Day 17

Read: Exodus 4

Summary: Moses is arguing with God. He figures that the Israelites will never believe that God sent him. So God, in His mercy, gives Moses the ability to do special miracles anytime to prove he was sent by God. How cool is that? But not only that, God sends Moses on a mission to set the Israelites free. Wow! After all Moses has done and the mistakes he has made, God wants to restore the relationship and still use him for His glory!

So Moses returns to Egypt and along the way, he meets his brother Aaron who God sent to help Moses out. Now that shows God cares! Not only has God chosen Moses, he also went ahead and picked out someone Moses loved to help him out. How cool is that?

Questions to ponder / discussion questions (choose one of the following)

- Think about it! If God showed you miracles and then sent you on a hard mission, would you believe God would help you out in every way possible? Or would you, like Moses, argue with God a little bit? Be honest! What things do you think you couldn't do, just like Moses?
- Just for fun, what kind of miracles would you want God to do through you if you had been Moses?

Day 18

Go on a mission just like Calvin and Milton were on their way to meet up with the gang for a special mission, and just like Moses was on his way to meet up with Aaron for his own special mission.

Take a paper and pen and write on it the time right now. Now as fast as you can, try to find the following objects in your home (feel free to change the list if some of the things are not in your home):

- Scissors
- Crayons
- A cartoon DVD
- A burnt out light bulb that hasn't been changed yet
- A rip or a tear in any fabric item (like a couch, or a shoe, or even a hole in a sock)
- A laundry basket
- A key
- Finally...find a hug from a parent or guardian!

Now write the time you finished, how do you think you did? Did you want to compete with a sibling?

Remember the story of Moses, God sent him on a special mission too. Moses probably felt like God had abandoned him after 40 years in the desert tending

sheep, but in the end, he found out that God loved him...just like God loves you – which is why your scavenger hunts ends with a hug!

Day 19

Read 1 John 4:10 and think about it! We can't fix our broken friendships and relationships without God's help. If He didn't send Jesus, *nothing* broken would ever get fixed in our hearts.

Do some listening prayer on the following question.

Prayer: "Lord Jesus, is there a friend or family member that I am hurting our relationship by something I've done or something I don't want to say sorry for? What is that thing?"

Write down what He tells you and then say 'thank You' to God for reaching out to us in love first.

Day 20

Work on memorizing Philippians 3:8 (NLT) *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*