

# foundations<sup>®</sup> for Middle School



**20 Day Devotional for MIDDLE SCHOOLERS**  
**Stolen Hearts**



**SOUTHLAND**  
CHURCH

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

# Welcome to...

## foundations<sup>®</sup> for Middle School

Dear Student,

This eBook is a tool that we hope will help you to get into the habit of doing regular devotions with Jesus. Now what are devotions? Devotions are simply a time you set aside to spend time with Jesus one-on-one! When you do devotions you pray, read your Bible and listen to God's voice for encouragement and direction in your life. You may already do this, or maybe you don't know where to start. This eBook is a GREAT place to start! Each time you do devotions you will want your Bible, a journal (like a notebook) and a pen!

If you have any questions about this booklet or how to do devotions, please ask your cell leader for some tips – of course you can email me directly as well! I trust you will grow closer and closer to Jesus this year!

In Him,



Thom Dick  
Middle School Pastor  
Southland Church

We welcome any ideas you have to make *Foundations for Middle School* better. If you want to offer some feedback or have questions about how to use *Foundations* more effectively talk to the pastor in your ministry area or email Pastor Thom at [thom@mysouthland.com](mailto:thom@mysouthland.com).

*Foundations for Middle School* is also available for download at [www.therenewedfamily.com](http://www.therenewedfamily.com).

# INTRODUCTION

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Have you ever looked at a sin problem that someone was stuck in and judged them in your heart, only to find out later just *why* that person is stuck in that sin? Once you found out the reasons for it, suddenly you had compassion on that person and sympathized with them! After all, if you were in their shoes, you would likely have ended up the same way.

Enter Jihail, Serai and Aran...petty thieves from Jerusalem in Jesus' day. We are given hints and clues as to *why* they are living the way they are and we begin to wonder, *what would I have done in their shoes?* We quickly discover the power of meeting Jesus and how He will transform the lives of these three thieves. Jesus doesn't judge them, or condemn them, He simply *transforms* them.

By the time we reach the end we find out that it was no longer Jihail, Serai and Aran who were stealing, but it was Jesus! Jesus stole their hearts and they would never be the same!

Journey with this small family and discover the power of Jesus' love in their lives. As you read through this devotional ask yourself, "How will He transform me too?"

## DAY ONE

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I watched the crowded marketplace from the alley, waiting for Serai to cause the diversion. Finally, I saw her slipping through the crowd, dressed simply in a beige men's tunic that hung to her knees, tightened at her waist with an ugly yellow sash. She carried an open leather flask of oil.

She stumbled and spilled olive oil everywhere. The people around her slipped and fell in a tangled mass, yelling curses and struggling to their feet. Fighting laughter, I ran forward and picked my way through the fallen crowd, quickly dipping my hands in every pocket I saw, slipping my findings into my own pocket. By the time I reached where Serai had fallen, I had stolen from eight men and three women.

Forcing my face into a worried, apologetic expression, I helped my sister to her feet and helped her escape the confusion. By the time we reached the alley, we were breathless with laughter. She led the way further into the maze of alleys and backroads until we were far from the accident scene. We sat down on old crates behind an abandoned building.

Serai grinned, her curly, tangled hair so black that it sometimes flickered blue. Her big brown eyes met mine and she laughed, "Everything went according to plan! How much did you get, Aran?"

I scattered the coins on the crate between us and she gasped. We each

grabbed a handful of them and counted them. Excited, I whisper-yelled, "Thirteen coppers and six silvers!"

Her eyes bugged. "Then, with mine added..." she closed her eyes, calculating. Her eyes flew open, gleaming with glee, "...thirty coppers, fourteen silvers, and one gold! That's enough to buy a few sacks of grain, or a haunch of pork, or even a mule! The gold alone could get us at least a chicken!"

I felt my own eyes widen, "One gold?! I wonder who was carrying that one. Come on, let's get back to the nest! Jihail will be thrilled!"

We pocketed the money and skirted the shadows towards our home area of Jerusalem. I felt a flicker of guilt. *Whoever had that gold coin must have worked really hard for it, I shook my head fiercely, the world doesn't care about us, so we have to take from the world!*

### NEXT STEPS

- As we open this devotional we meet two street thieves. It's easy to judge the hearts of other people from the mistakes they make. But aren't you glad that God is our judge and that He knows our hearts! Take a moment and pray: "Jesus, please show me a sin that I have been hiding from You!" **Confess it and ask His forgiveness!** He is merciful.

### FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)

- Read 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. This will be our memory verse this month. Begin getting familiar with it.

## DAY TWO

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Aran and Serai survive in the slums of ancient Jerusalem, over two thousand years ago. They steal for a living, barely carving out an existence.

Isn't it sad that they can find their happiness in stealing such from others? Stealing is all they know; it's the way they survive. Is there a sin in your life that feels familiar and even necessary? Maybe you feel stuck in it? Have you confessed this to your cell leader or parents and set up accountability?

Sometimes we look down on 'sinners' at school and church with disgust and disdain, but that's not right. After all, we are all sinners and all deserve to go to hell. It is only in accepting the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made that we can escape hell and go to heaven after death.

### NEXT STEPS

- Think of one person whom you haven't been very loving to. Perhaps you think they're annoying, or they bully you, or they ignore you. Write this name down in your journal.
- Now pray, "Holy Spirit, would You show me three things that You like about this person?" Write down what He shows you.

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)

- Read John 3:16-17
- Read Matthew 5:43-48

## DAY THREE

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When we reached the shadowy alley between two crumbling buildings it was quiet. A rough hewn wood gate cut off the mouth of the alley, but as street kids, it was really easy to scamper up over the fence. After landing in the dirt on the other side, Serai and I ran to the end of the alley. In the building on the left was an open doorway; the door itself had fallen off its hinges years ago.

We tiptoed through the rubble and into the building, which was quite bright due to the high windows and holes in the walls. In one corner of the small building, a muscular, short young man sat on their rug covered pile of stones and rubble. Serai ran to him, screeching, "Jihail!" He opened his arms to her and enveloped her in a hug when she reached him. I grinned and hurried to them. Jihail's warm brown eyes glanced over me before he pulled me to him in a quick hug. "Aran, Serai. Where have you been?"

I frowned as he released us, "The marketplaces, as always."

Pain and disgust flashed across his face, which he quickly hid with a stiff smile. "Right, of course. What...what have you brought?"

I glanced at Serai and we made eye contact. Concern and confusion flickered in her brown eyes. She had noticed his odd behaviour as well. I forced a smile which I was sure was as fake as Jihail's. "Many coppers, many silvers, and even a gold!"

Jihail seemed distracted and not nearly as happy as I had expected. "Oh, that's...wonderful." Noticing our doubt, he again tried smiling, "Truly. Truly wonderful."

I felt Serai's eyes on me and asked cautiously, "Is everything...all right?"

Again, the false smile. "Hmm? Oh yes, of course. It's just...yes, it's nothing."

I raised my eyebrows. He huffed and quickly explained, his words tumbling together with excitement, "Look, I met this man outside of Jerusalem. My men and I were lying in wait to attack Him and His companions on the road, you know, like we always do, and then we heard Him speaking to his companions. What He said was so interesting! His words captivated me, and though His words were not fancy like a noble's, they were filled with grace and sincerity. I figured that He was a pagan priest or some such, but He spoke of the Jewish God, Yahweh. When I peeked over the rock mound, I saw Him and He certainly didn't look like a priest or a noble...just like a merchant or pilgrim. What do you make of that?!"

I did little to disguise my disappointment that my twenty-year-old brother (eight years older than me) had been deceived and drawn in by one of those travelling priests. "I think He's just one of those fool pretenders, Jihail! How

could you believe Him?!"

Jihail's eyes grew cold, as if I had betrayed him. "If you'd heard Him, you'd understand! He'll enter Jerusalem tomorrow morning...go see Him, listen to Him speak. That's all I ask! He'll come declared 'Jesus of Nazareth, Prophet of God'"

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Isaiah 53 which is prophecy all about Jesus' life and death. Take note of how many times it talks about Him being seen as 'ordinary' or even 'sinful'. People did not see the truth and even notice. Aran and Serai also did not see what would be so special about this man. Many didn't; the devil had blinded them to the truth.

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

## **DAY FOUR**

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It's crazy how much of an impact Jesus made on people just from meeting them once. Many people just left everything to follow Him. For example, the Bible doesn't say if Simon and Andrew had ever met Jesus before, but they just got up and followed Him anyway, leaving their profession behind. That's how we should shine in our school and in our homes: salt of the earth, a light in the darkness.

How can we impact the world if we are exactly the same as everyone else? Thankfully, God has given us the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit who speaks to us and helps us be true followers. Ask God to show you one way that you can be 'different' at school and at home. Have you been gossiping lately? Have you been slacking in your homework? Have you been bitter towards someone?

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Matthew 4:18-22
- Take out a piece of paper and ask God, "What is one way I can be 'different' at school and at home?" Write down what He shows you.

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Matthew 5:13-16
- Have you been gossiping lately? Have you been slacking in your homework? Have you been bitter towards someone? Ask Him to help you solve the problem. That could mean spending more time on homework, forgiving someone, or even stopping gossip by saying encouraging, positive things about the person who is being gossiped about.

# DAY FIVE

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I sighed as Serai and I settled in a cubby hole to hide in with a perfect view of the gate the supposed 'prophet' would enter through. *I can't believe Jihail's fallen for one of those money-making schemes. This ridiculous prophet-guy probably doesn't even know the Scriptures! This is a waste of time. We could already be in the Apothecary's street by now, stealing mint leaves for tea.*

For an hour we sat, bored and hungry, watching the gate. Hundreds of people clogged up the road and I doubted that we would notice one so-called prophet. But then a group of men were yelling, "Make way for Jesus of Nazareth!"

The crowd parted like a sea and I couldn't believe my eyes when people threw down their cloaks and palm branches for a normal looking man and His donkey colt to ride over. *Is He that famous already that He gets a fancy entrance into the city? What makes Him so special? What makes Him different from the other frauds and fortune tellers? He seems to have quite a few followers already...*

Serai tugged my sleeve and whispered, "Look, one of His friends is Matthew, that snooty tax collector! Surely this guy's just a fraud...remember when Matthew evicted us from our home?"

I searched each face till I recognized the greedy man. "Fools," I muttered, "half the people here will recognize him and then their farce is over. Why didn't they try a different city, where Matthew wouldn't have been recognized? They would've gotten paid a lot more, surely, for more people would have believed them!"

Just as I finished speaking, staring at the man called Jesus, He looked straight into my eyes. Something stirred inside me as I matched Him, stare for stare. As He rode past us, He turned His head and held my gaze for a moment longer, then looked forward. I shivered, but not from the cold.

There was something very strange about that man...some quiet authority I couldn't decipher. *Never mind him...you have a sister to feed.*

## NEXT STEPS

- Read Luke 19:28-40

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

## DAY SIX

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Aran's curiosity is piqued: though he's seen dozens of false prophets before, none have seemed so ordinary, yet so different.

But that's actually what we read in the Bible. Jesus was indeed very different, both in the way He spoke **and** the things He spoke. He impacted people's hearts greatly. His teaching wasn't stiff and dusty. One of the most profound examples of how Christianity is so different from other religions is found in the Beatitudes (in the additional reading list below). It is not the proud, powerful and wealthy who inherit heaven, but rather those who thirst for God.

### NEXT STEPS

- Read Matthew 7:28-29
- Ask God to show you one way to bless someone in your family today. Maybe that means doing someone else's job, helping a younger sibling with homework

### FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)

- Matthew 5:2-12

## DAY SEVEN

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I stepped out of the hiding place, Serai close behind me. I turned to lead her back home. We could hear the whispers of the crowd, "Isn't that Matthew, the tax collector? He's the one who charged me six silvers too much!"; "They call the man Jesus, a prophet of God. I say he's just a fraud, like those hot-headed priests in the Temple."; "I saw this man heal a paralyzed man! I saw it with my own eyes!"

At this last exclamation, I leaned closer to the merchant who said it and caught more of his story, "See, this man, Jesus, was preachin' 'bout the Father and such mighty stuff, when the roof was sawed open and a man who can't walk, my fishing buddy called Old Jerem, was lowered down with ropes, you see, and this Jesus forgave the man's sins and told him to walk! Old Jerem went skipping and hopping away, without even a limp!"

I snorted, again staring at the back of the prophet-man. *Impossible. Entirely out of the question. People don't just get healed.* As if reading my thoughts, the prophet-man, this Jesus, looked over His shoulder at me and smiled.

I swallowed nervously. *Why do I feel as if the man caught me stealing or something? I have a strange feeling about Him, and that's true enough. He has an honest smile, though. The kind you don't see on nobles. Or so-said prophets.*

When we got home, it was very quiet. Jihail was lying on the rubble, unconscious...or dead. My heart leaped into my throat. Serai screamed and ran forward, crouching next to him and shaking him. He moaned.

I rushed to them. "Jihail, what's the matter?"

Serai felt Jihail's forehead, then jerked her hand back. "He's burning up with fever! Jihail, what made you sick?"

He just moaned weakly again. Serai whipped her head around to face me, tears wetting her eyes. "This is what gramps did before he died! He must have drunk the polluted well water! Why would he do that?! We have to steal medicine!"

I nodded, fear trickling through me. "Go!" She sprang away at a sprint.

Jihail's eyes fluttered open for a moment, and he grasped my hand. I leaned closer to hear him growl, "I won't drink stolen medicine!"

I shook my head vehemently. "Yes, you have to! There's no other way!"

His eyes were stubborn. "Get Jesus..."

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Mark 1:29-34

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

## **DAY EIGHT**

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Aran is at a crossroads...try to force-feed Jihail medicine or get Jesus. Aran obviously disagreed with Jihail about getting Jesus. But we know that Aran's opinion here was wrong – and when we want to help someone else, we can't always trust our own opinions.

The Bible story in the 'next steps' section below deals with a Samaritan and some Jews. The Samaritans and Jews were enemies, but the Samaritan helped out the Jewish man anyways. This is how we should be, setting aside our grudges and gossip to help those who need it, even if they have wronged you in the past.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Luke 10:30-35
- Remember the person you prayed for on day two? It was the person who you don't feel very loving towards. Ask God, "Lord, what is one thing that I can pray for \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name)?"

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- In addition to praying for your friend, ask God, "Jesus, please show me a simple act of kindness I can do for \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name)." Now, go out and do it!

## DAY NINE

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My heart in my throat, I left Jihail's side and sprinted through the streets. *Why does he have to be so stubborn?! Anger and fear caused tears to stream down my face, making my vision blurry as I dodged through the crowds towards the gate in which Jesus had entered. Why?! Why Jihail?! Why can't you just swallow some stupid medicine?!*

As I searched frantically for the prophet-man, doubt and fear danced through my thoughts. *What if Jihail is dead by the time we come back?! What if Jesus can't heal him, and he really is a fraud? What if Serai can't find any medicine? I impatiently searched every face in the market place, my hope dying. What am I even thinking?! Of course the man is a fraud! Why am I even looking for him?! I should be in the Street of Apothecaries, stealing medicine!*

Just as I turned towards the Street of Apothecaries I saw the former tax collector, Matthew, turning a corner at the end of a street. Heart racing, I sprinted after him. *I'm probably making a really stupid choice, following this man to his fraud prophet...Jihail could die in this time!* But my heart had latched onto the hope of a healing and I again remembered the look in Jesus' eyes when we made eye contact: The thoughtful understanding, as though my whole life story was laid before Him. The friendly, knowing smile as if He had a great secret that He couldn't share. I shook the memory away and concentrated on following Matthew. *I can't let myself hope that the man is anything special or His failures will crush me.*

Finally, Matthew stopped at the house of Sephar, a good and kind merchant who had helped me and my siblings on several occasions. Just as he was about to enter the courtyard through the gate I yelled, "Matthew!"

He turned and looked at me with surprise. I felt my blood boil with hatred for the man, but I had no choice but to speak with him. I jogged up to him. "Matthew, where is Jesus?"

Matthew glanced at the house, "He is inside, healing Sephar's young daughter and then He is leaving to spend the night in Bethany."

I remembered young Riana clearly. She would tell us stories sometimes, as she could not play with us, for she was crippled and could not walk. My heart sped up. *Will Riana actually be healed? Will she be able to walk?! I wouldn't be able to believe it...*

Just then out of the house were heard shouts of joy and praises to God, and I started to sweat. *Is it real? Can Riana actually walk?!* Then her face appeared in her bedroom window, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Aran!" she squealed and left the window. I felt myself pale as she burst out of the house a few seconds later and ran towards us. Halfway to us she spun awkwardly, her skirts whirling, laughing breathlessly. My own eyes stung from tears as I watched her frolic. Her feet, which had been turned inside and disfigured, were now perfect. I felt like I was watching from the outside, not quite comprehending what had happened. Then Jesus stepped out of the house and He smiled at me.

## NEXT STEPS

- Aran has had Jesus look at him several times now. Close your eyes and imagine Jesus looking at you. Imagine the twinkle in His eyes and the smile as He delights in you. Forget about all the wrong you have done for a moment. Ask Jesus, “Lord, what do You love about me?” Write down what He shows you.
- Continue praying for \_\_\_\_\_ (name from day two) as God showed you on day eight.

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

# DAY TEN

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It must be incredible to see a miracle like that. Imagine, knowing someone your whole life who can't walk, and then seeing them dance and run around, totally healed. It would be breathtakingly unbelievable!

Have you ever seen a miracle? It could be anything from an amazing healing story to something smaller, like someone offering you part of their lunch when you forgot your food at home.

## NEXT STEPS

- Slowly read through Psalm 34.

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)

- Ask a parent, pastor or church leader (you decide) to share a story of a miracle that happened in their life. Now, take a moment to thank God for that miracle story in their life!

# DAY ELEVEN

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Ten minutes later I was hurrying through the emptying streets, Jesus and his followers a bit behind. My heart pounded in my ears like crashing waves, but it couldn't drown out my fear. *I fear that we are too late. Or that Jesus can't heal illnesses. Or that...*

The quick run to my home felt far too long and I feared that Jihail must already be dead. I led Jesus and His friends through a side door and into the abandoned building I called home. I could see Serai's petite form bending over Jihail, pleading with him in desperate tones. “Serai!”

Her head whipped towards us and her face froze in shock as she saw the thirteen men behind me. I reached her first and she scampered out of the way

as I brushed aside the bottles of medicine and crouched at Jihail's side. He was moaning faintly and when I felt his forehead, it was burning. "The fever's much worse! Hurry!"

I leaned back as Jesus crouched on Jihail's other side. He glanced at me, and I clenched my jaw. He looked back at Jihail and took his hand, whispering, "Your sins are forgiven...be healed."

Instantly Jihail's body relaxed noticeably. I tentatively touched his forehead, it was cool. *What?! His fever's gone!* I jerked my hand back, heart thundering, shock working its way through my veins. *He healed him! He actually healed him!* I looked up at Jesus, astonished. He smiled.

I leaned back on my hands, speechless with confusion, not sure if I wanted to dance or scream. So I stayed silent and simply stared at Jesus. *He just...He just healed Jihail. Jihail's fever went away, just because He said those words! Jihail's healed!*

I glanced down at Jihail just as his eyes fluttered open and he groaned. He looked at me for a moment and seemed a little confused, all at once he noticed Jesus beside him. He yelled in surprise and stumbled to his feet, looking down at himself. Then he looked at me, eyes wide. I managed a smile. He looked at Jesus and began turning pale. "You just...you healed me! Th-thank you, Jesus, sir! Thank you, very m-much!"

Jesus laughed and stood, then glanced at one of his followers. This follower cleared his throat, "Did you drink poisonous water?"

Jihail ran his fingers through his dark hair. "I...I think the watered-down wine I bought must have been made with unclean water."

The man nodded. "That would explain things. I am Luke...I am a doctor."

Jihail nodded his understanding. "Ah, I am Jihail, this is my brother Aran and my sister Serai."

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Matthew 8:14-17
- Spend a few minutes praising God for His incredible power. Thank Him for whatever He brings to mind.

## **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)**

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

# DAY TWELVE

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Aran made the right choice and trusted Jesus, and as a result Jihail was healed! Jesus did miracles like this all over the place.

Imagine how Jihail must have felt! Knowing that he should be close to death, and then being completely healed! Aran surely cannot forget this, and that's how it should be. Our actions should have a lasting impact on people, and so should our words.

One way to have lasting impact is to hide God's Word in our hearts. Why? Because God's Word hidden in our hearts gets down deep like food into our stomachs and it actually energizes us and gives us strength to resist sin and obey Him.

So you see how powerful and important the Word is to us. It is actually incredible and wonderful that we have such an impacting book that brings us closer to Jesus!

## NEXT STEPS

- Three simple, but powerful verses about God's Word to read:
  - Read Psalm 119:11
  - Read 2 Timothy 3:16
  - Read Hebrews 4:12

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)

- Take out your journal (or a blank piece of paper)! It's time to ask God some questions. Find a quiet place and give yourself a minute to quiet your heart and mind. Now ask God the following questions and write down what He says:
  - a. "Jesus, what kind of affect have my words had on people this week (good or bad)?"
  - b. "What words of encouragement do You have for me, Lord?"

# DAY THIRTEEN

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I glanced over the attentive faces of Jesus' disciples as He finished His parable, saying, "...He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'"

For days we had traveled with Jesus and His followers watching in awe as He performed incredible miracles. We listened eagerly as He preached amazing messages of forgiveness and action. I soon got use to understanding His parables, as it usually didn't take me too long to figure out the meaning. *His teaching makes so much sense! And more than that, it just feels...right. It feels true and it makes me want to love God, makes me want to help the poor and*

*follow Him. It inspires me...and it inspires many, many others, for He has a very large following.*

It was silent for a moment and I looked back at Jesus. He looked solemn and sad. He glanced into each of our eyes, then said soberly, "As you know, the Passover is two days away and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

I looked down into my lap and continued ripping up blades of grass. Such statements made me uncomfortable, for I could never figure out who the Son of Man or Son of God were, though it felt like I should. It felt like there was a fog in my brain that stopped me from understanding. It frustrated me.

Then Matthew smiled tentatively and raised his water flask. "Shall we find a stream or well to refill our flasks and have a drink?"

We cheered. Sweat had been dripping down our backs and dampening our hair, so we got up and sluggishly meandered back down the Mount of Olives.

Jihail walked beside me. He glanced behind him then offered, "Here, I still have some water in my flask. What did you think of Jesus' parable? About the goats and the sheep?"

I took his flask and drank deeply, then thanked him and handed it back. "It makes perfect sense. I mean, isn't Jesus always saying that we should forgive others because the Father forgives us? Why should helping the least be any different?"

Jihail flashed a smile at me. "Well said...I can't help but agree." We walked in silence for a few minutes, then Jihail mused, "I wonder how long we should follow Jesus...I mean we don't really have much that we left behind, and there's nothing waiting for us in Jerusalem, so I wouldn't be opposed to following Him forever. We aren't missing much."

I nodded. "I agree and so does Serai. You've seen how much she loves the adventure of traveling and hearing His stories...I only wish we'd met Jesus earlier!"

Jihail chuckled. I glanced back at Serai. Her delicate, dark brows were drawn together in a concentrated frown as she stared at the ground, following behind slowly. I guessed that she was thinking over all that Jesus had said. *I hope this lasts forever!*

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Once you truly meet Jesus and get to know Him, there are really only two choices: refuse to follow Him or fall in love with Him as Jihail, Aran and Serai did.
- Ask Jesus the following: "Jesus, please show me something amazing about You." Write down what He shows you!

## **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Bring your journal to a parent or friend and share the amazing thing He told you about Himself in the 'Next Steps' section above.

## DAY FOURTEEN

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It's crazy that Jihail, Aran and Serai trusted Jesus enough to just 'get up and follow Him'. Like we said...Jesus' words have lasting impact.

The Bible makes it very clear that there are great eternal rewards for our faith...even though following Jesus can give us trouble here on earth, in heaven it will be well worth it!

We are to die to ourselves and follow Christ in this life, then go to be with Him forever! Doesn't that sound amazing? This life isn't our ultimate home...heaven is. So we must trust God with our future and this life, and wait patiently for the next life.

The fact that God promises us eternal rewards if we take up our crosses and follow Him is crazy in the first place! Is that not proof of God's great love? That He would share His great Kingdom with us, when we clearly could never deserve it?

### NEXT STEPS

- Read Matthew 19:27-30
- Take a few minutes to imagine heaven...of the peace you'd feel there, the creatures you'd see, the freedom of love. Close your eyes and imagine it with me. Wouldn't it be incredible? Write down your thoughts and describe what you pictured in your mind.

### FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)

- Recite 1 John 3:23
- Ask God to remind you of someone who really needs Jesus. This could be a friend at school or someone in your class or maybe a cousin or another family member. Jesus loves them and wants to bring them to heaven someday as well. Pray for that person to come to Jesus.

## DAY FIFTEEN

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I leaned against a cold rock and stared at the stars. We were in a place called Gethsemane. Higher up on the hill were the Twelve, and even further was Jesus. It was dark and I could hardly see anything. *Our Passover supper was so tense, what with Jesus saying that Judas will betray him! And then Judas left...I wonder if he'll be back with guards to haul off Jesus? I hope not!*

I slipped off my worn reed sandals. My feet were grimy with dust and my heels were blistered from walking. *Ugh...we've done so much walking! I feel like my toes are going to fall off! I'm thankful for this rest, though.*

Suddenly I saw torchlight winding its way through the hilly garden and I heard the footsteps and excitement of a large crowd. Fear alighting in my belly, I crouched against the rock. *Have the Pharisees finally come for Jesus?! Did Judas*

*really betray us?! Let it not be so!*

Then Jihail was grabbing my arm and yanking me into the shadows of the trees, clapping his hand over my mouth. Serai crept to us and we watched in fearful silence as the mob hurried farther up. Then I faintly heard Jesus' calm, authoritative voice followed shortly thereafter with the scream of a man in pain.

My heart raced and my breathing was fast. Adrenaline thundered through my veins. *They must have come for Jesus! Everyone knows they hate him, and they've tried to get him in trouble so many times! God, please protect Him!*

Then the crowd came tromping back down the hill, torches flaring, and I think I glimpsed Jesus in the tumult. My heart ached for Him and I prayed for His safety, though something in me whispered that safety was no longer with Him.

We crouched there, scarcely breathing, for what felt like years. Then Jihail grabbed both our hands and led us quietly back towards Jerusalem. The whole walk we didn't speak for fear and sadness made the air thick.

Finally, after a long time of walking, we reached Jerusalem and skirted the shadows till we reached our old, collapsed home. Worry making me feel sick in my stomach, I lay down on my rug, but could not sleep.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Matthew 26:17-56

## **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Jesus' arrest would have been very scary for His followers. Imagine seeing your Saviour arrested and treated badly. Yet the Bible tells us that everything He suffered was for our healing and benefit. Do the following:
  - Get a journal (or piece of paper and pen)
  - Ask God to show you 3 things that you benefit from His death and resurrection – write them down!
  - Now thank God out loud for these three things!

# **DAY SIXTEEN**

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Fear must have driven through the disciples' hearts like a nail under a hammer! Imagine, the powerful, just, kind and wise man that you worship being hauled off by an angry mob...without fighting back!

Fear is crippling...and thankfully God doesn't want us to face it alone! Sometimes God lets us be afraid so that we learn to trust in Him and other times He simply takes it away. Fear can humble us. Fear can drive us to our knees in desperate prayer. Fear can chase us from the enemy's side and into God's arms.

Fear can also cripple our belief. Fear can shrivel our heart and suck the life out of our hope. Ultimately, fear is terribly devastating. But if you cling to God,

He won't let fear destroy you. God has power over fear and He will never let it destroy you. Yes, you will feel fear, but it cannot ruin your heart...not if you continue to seek out God and implore Him to be at your side.

Think about a time when you were truly afraid. On a plane? Swimming deeper than ever before? Going to the zoo and seeing snakes, spiders or other intimidating creatures? Making a class presentation? Being chased by a stray dog? Standing up to a bully? Think about the situation. Did God help you with it? Maybe it was something really obvious that He did for you, like calming your fear or maybe He was simply with you. Thank Him for this! Sometimes we don't feel a difference when we ask for courage, but at least we can remember and know that God promises to always be with us.

He is the only one who we can trust with everything...our life, soul, heart, etc. God is the only saviour, the only God, the only Messiah.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Isaiah 41:13
- Matthew 28:28
- In your journal, write out a simple prayer of thanks to God for His promise to be with you always.

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)**

- Pray the following prayer and write down what He shows you: "Holy Spirit, what is one way this week that You have been with me, even if I didn't know it?"

## **DAY SEVENTEEN**

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I watched, horrified and frozen in fear as Jesus struggled through the crowd carrying a wooden cross. The wooden cross made for Jesus to be crucified on.

A cold, hard ball of fear and dismay grew in my stomach with every stumbling step Jesus took. *God, why aren't you doing anything? Why isn't Jesus healing Himself and refuting them with His wise words?! Why doesn't He stop them?!*

Jihail squeezed my shoulder with an iron hard grip and I knew the same fear and anger churned in him. Serai stood frozen and pale on Jihail's other side, and Jihail slowly sank down to his knees, his eyes never leaving Jesus.

My nausea only grew as I watched Jesus struggling up the hill. He was bleeding, His torn flesh crying crimson tears. His eyes locked on mine and they were filled with so much love and sorrow that my vision blurred with tears.

I forced myself to look down, His eyes piercing my soul. *God, where are you?! You said this was Your Son! Why isn't Jesus doing something?! God, why isn't He fighting them, rebuking them, showing His power by healing Himself?!*

I cried quietly, tears streaming down my cheeks as Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross, and as He was raised up high, crying out in agony. His cries

seemed to twist my heart like a wet rag, squeezing the life out of it.

I covered my mouth with my hand, biting my knuckles, holding back a torrent of sobbing. My vision watery and my heart seeming to be stretched apart as I turned and burrowed my face in Jihail's robes, sobs racking my body, despair clouding my heart.

I don't know how long we were there. A minute? An hour? All I knew is that my heart ached and I wasn't sure it would ever stop hurting. *What now? If Jesus doesn't come down from the cross, then what now? We have no family. No home. No money. We'll have to go back to stealing...as if nothing ever happened. As if nothing had changed. As if we hadn't changed.* Jihail put his arm around me, pinning me tighter to his chest. I felt him weeping, his body shaking. *God, where are you?*

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Have you ever felt like your world was falling apart? He knows what it is like! Read through Matthew 27:11-55. As you read it, take note of the different pain He felt. For example, He felt rejection from His followers. He also felt the pain of having lies told about Him. Any hurt done to you He already has been there.

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keeners!)**

- Read our memory verse 1 John 3:23 over a couple of times. Try reciting it without help.

## **DAY EIGHTEEN**

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We already know the story, so these events are not surprising, but imagine how the disciples must have felt in the moment! Their dreams were crushed and doubt would creep into their hearts...doubt that Jesus was truly more powerful than Satan, that Jesus really was the Messiah.

Israel had expected a glorious saviour who would wage war against Rome and free them from slavery and poverty, but Jesus had a different type of saving in mind. He would give our hearts and souls the choice to be freed from sin...which is far better than a physical battle.

Jesus' death is even more meaningful when we reflect on how He could have saved Himself. He'd saved and healed countless people...surely He could've have saved Himself and healed Himself.

But His last prayers to His Father were for us. Isn't that dumbfounding?

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read John 3:16-21, write in your journal anything that sticks out to you.

## FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)

- God often doesn't do as we expect, but what He does is **always** way better than what we wanted. Jesus didn't come and conquer the Romans, but He did come and conquer a far more sinister and powerful enemy...sin! Write in your journal of a time that God did something in your life that was quite a bit different than what you expected. If you can't remember a time, quiet your heart and mind and ask Him to remind you of a time.

## DAY NINETEEN

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My heart pounded and I felt myself pale as I stared at Jesus. There He stood a little farther up the mountain trail in a clean white robe and holes in His wrists. It was exactly as the two women had said. *Is it Him?! It can't very well be anyone else, but...how can it be?!*

We all just stared at our Lord and Master slack jawed and frozen in unbelief. The silence was thick with a screaming war between hope and doubt, belief and unbelief, fear and joy. Then I saw the tiniest movement...on my right, a tear slowly trickled down Peter's cheek. Then I knew that it must be Jesus. Then we all knew, for Peter knew. He always believed. Peter gave a loud whoop and ran to Jesus and they embraced. The silence shattered along with our fear, doubt and unbelief. We all rushed forward, weeping with joy, relief and pure happiness!

Jesus laughed and greeted all of us and we watched Him in awe. We fell at His feet and worshipped. I was so overcome with joy that tears streamed down my cheeks.

Then Jesus said to all of us, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Then Jesus taught us many more things, and our hearts felt as light as clouds. While He was leading us up the trail, Luke dropped behind and started whispering with Jihail, who was in front of me. I couldn't hear anything they were saying, but it seemed like it must be important.

Serai giggled beside me. I glanced at her; she was beaming, her smile like sunshine. She did a little twirl, singing, "Jesus is alive!"

I laughed. *Girls*. But I was grinning, too. It had been a wonderful day. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had told us all that Jesus had risen from the dead and that we were supposed to meet Him here. Jihail and I had been theorizing in suspicious but hopeful whispers all the way here. *I don't think I've ever been happier!*

Then Jihail and Luke seemed to decide on something, and Jihail dropped back to walk with Serai and I. He slung his arms around our shoulders and

whispered, "How would you two like to apprentice under Luke, the physician?"

I gasped, searching his eyes. Serai looked just as excited. Butterflies danced in my stomach as Jihail grinned. "Luke has agreed to teach both of you how to be a doctor. What do you say? We can travel with him, treating the sick and spreading the words of Jesus?"

I'd never heard anything more wonderful in my life! Serai and I were speechless. *We'll get to heal people and learn how to mix medicines and deliver medication to people...and we won't have to steal any more or run from guards! God, can this be true?*

Luke looked over his shoulder at us and just smiled. I grabbed Serai's hands and twirled her around, both of us laughing breathlessly. *Jesus came to life, Serai and I will get to apprentice under a doctor and learn medicines, and we'll get to travel and talk about Jesus! What could be better?*

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Read Matthew 28:1-20

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)**

- The Bible tells us that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Pull out your journal and ask God to show you some things to be thankful for. How many can you write down? When you are done, go through the list and thank God for each one *out loud*.

## **DAY TWENTY**

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Isn't God wonderful? We can see in this story that His plans always work out for those who love Him. Yes, there are trials and yes, there are hardships, but in the end we still have God, which is the most important thing ever.

Now spend some time earnestly thanking God for His wisdom, love, and sacrifice. Remember some times in your life where everything felt hopeless, then God came and rescued you from it or helped you endure it. Maybe it was a sin issue, a difficult relationship or anxiety. Whatever it was, thank God.

Recite your verses for the last time. :) Thank God for meeting you through this devotional.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Get out your journal and pen! Ask God to speak to you as you read Psalm 100 and write down anything that stands out to you.

### **FURTHER CHALLENGE (for you keepers!)**

- Write a letter to God: Tell Him about how you are doing; ask Him for help in areas where you need it; thank Him for things He has done etc.
- Take the letter and read it to a family member or trusted friend.

## **EPILOGUE**

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After Jesus rose into the sky, Aran and Serai apprenticed themselves to Luke and both became skilled healers. Jihail married one of Jesus' sisters and Aran grew up and married Riana, the girl who had been crippled but was healed by Jesus.

As for Serai...she married a Roman Centurion whom she had stolen from when they were both kids. Because it was disreputable for women to be doctors, she set her mind on mending and became a renowned seamstress.

The world would never be the same after Jesus came and went...it may have felt the same to us, but there was indeed a difference...there was hope and an incredible offer of salvation. What more proof do we need that God loves us?