

## THE WINNING TEAM

READ: PSALM 37:1-2, 7-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:56-58

They'll never win! Look at the score," moaned Marco. He was spending the evening with his grandfather, who had suggested they watch a basketball game on TV. Marco loved basketball and couldn't sit still as his favorite team ran up and down the court. He jumped in delight when they scored but collapsed on the sofa when they missed a shot at the basket.

"They're doing awful," Marco said in disgust when his team dropped several points behind. "We should be cheering for the other team." Marco stood up. "Maybe I'll go play with Sparky for a while."

"Is that how you support your team?" Grandpa teased. "Come back and cheer them on."

"It's not like they can hear me," muttered Marco, but he trudged back to his seat.

A little later, a commercial came on. Grandpa hit a button on the remote, and the commercial zipped rapidly by.

"Hey!" Marco pointed at the screen. "Is this game recorded?" Grandpa grinned and nodded. "So you already know how it's going to end!" said Marco.

"I like it that way," said Grandpa. "There's less pressure with no surprise endings." He smiled and pointed to his Bible on the table. "That's one reason I'm so glad to have the Bible. It tells how the biggest match of all will end."

"Grandpa! There's no story of a basketball game in the Bible," said Marco.

"No," said Grandpa. "The match I'm talking about is much bigger than a basketball game. The Bible tells us about a battle being fought to win the world! Satan wants the hearts and minds of everyone, and sometimes it seems like he might be winning. Then the pressure for us to give up and desert our team—God's team—can be pretty great, especially when it seems like everyone is against us."

"But we already know how the battle will end, don't we?" said Marco.

Grandpa nodded. "We know Jesus is going to win that battle, because He already defeated Satan when He died on the cross and rose again to save us. When it's over, those who belong to Jesus will celebrate the victory with Him. That's one victory celebration you don't want to miss." ♥ HEATHER TEKAVEC

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### JESUS WILL BE THE FINAL VICTOR OVER SATAN

**KEY VERSE:** THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:57

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Does it ever seem like the whole world is against you because you're a Christian? Do you wonder whether it's really worth the effort to follow Jesus? If you know Jesus as your Savior, be confident that you're on the winning team. Be faithful as you trust and obey Him, even when it's not easy. He's already defeated Satan, and when the final battle is won, you'll enjoy the rewards of His victory.



## NOT ALONE

READ: MATTHEW 18:1-3; MARK 10:13-16

*I wish Mom wouldn't leave me home alone when she goes out at night,* thought Ivy as she huddled under the ragged sheet on her bed. She felt her stomach rumble. Her mother had told her to find herself something to eat, but there hadn't been much in the cupboard other than a few crackers and peanut butter. Ivy hugged Ruffles, her teddy bear, close. "I'm so glad I got you back," she whispered. Ruffles was very old and worn, and Ivy's mother had tossed him into the trash. Just in time, Ivy had seen him there and rescued him.

Ivy sighed. *I wish every day were Wednesday,* she thought. That was when Mrs. Adams came to the community center after school and taught a children's Bible club. "I love to hear about Jesus. He cares about everybody, even little kids and sick people," Ivy murmured as she remembered the Bible story Mrs. Adams had told the week before.

"A man came to Jesus with a terrible disease—leprosy. It was a very contagious disease, and those who had it were covered with ugly sores, so lepers were sent to live alone outside the city," Mrs. Adams had explained. "No one wanted to come near them or touch them. But Jesus loved the sick man, and He reached out, touched the leper, and healed him. Jesus loves you that much too. He came to our broken world to save us and give us a new life with Him, and He promises to be with us in our troubles."

Ivy looked at her teddy bear. *Mom thought Ruffles was ugly because he's old and his stuffing is leaking out, so she threw him away,* she thought. A tear slipped down her cheek. *Sometimes I wonder if she thinks I'm ugly too. Sometimes she acts like she doesn't even want me.* Ivy thought again of the story of the leper, and another one Mrs. Adams had told about Jesus inviting little children to come to him when others tried to shoo them away.

"Thank You for loving me, Jesus," whispered Ivy. "Thank You for being with me all the time, even when I don't feel you there. I'm so glad I'm never really alone."

Ivy's lips curved up in a smile as she hugged Ruffles closer to her, and soon she fell asleep. ♥ CAROLYN E. YOST

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### JESUS LOVES YOU

**KEY VERSE:** [JESUS SAID], "LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME. DON'T STOP THEM! FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO THOSE WHO ARE LIKE THESE CHILDREN." MARK 10:14 (NLT)

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Are there things in your life that make you sad? Do you feel alone—as though no one cares about you? Jesus cares. He left heaven and came to earth to rescue you. He understands everything you're going through, and He promises to stay with you no matter what. You don't ever need to be alone. Trust Him as your Savior today.

## RUBBED THE WRONG WAY

READ: PSALM 32:1-5

A cat's loud meow came from the living room—again and again. “Ava,” called Mom, “what are you doing to Luna?” Not waiting for an answer, she left her work in the office and went to investigate. “Why did Luna yowl like that?” she asked as she walked into the room.

“I was just petting her,” said Ava. “When Luna turned around to face the other way, I didn’t change the direction I was stroking her, so I was rubbing her fur opposite from the way it naturally lays.” Ava grinned. “That made it all stand up. I thought it was funny, but Luna didn’t like it!”

“I’m sure she didn’t!” said Mom. “It must feel uncomfortable for a cat to have its fur rubbed the wrong way. Don’t do that anymore.”

When Ava returned home from school the next day, she didn’t look happy. “How was your day?” asked Mom.

Ava avoided her mom’s eyes. “Fine.”

“Really?” asked Mom. “It doesn’t seem like it was fine.”

Ava looked at her mom, then burst into tears. “Oh, Mom! I cheated on a test. There were some really hard questions, and since I sit in the back corner, I was able to pull some of my notes out of my bag without anyone noticing. But now I feel awful!”

Mom gave Ava a hug. “And do you know why you feel that way?”

Ava sniffled. “Because I know it was wrong?”

Mom nodded. “Remember how Luna hated having her fur rubbed the wrong way? When we sin, it’s as if our fur is being rubbed the wrong way. That’s because sin goes against who we are as Christians. Jesus freed us from sin, so it’s the opposite of how we should be living our lives as God’s children. That’s why it makes you feel uncomfortable and guilty, and you don’t feel right again until you confess your sin to Jesus. When you do, He will forgive you.”

“I guess I need to do that now,” Ava said, wiping her eyes. She sighed. “I’ll have to tell Mrs. Naveen I cheated too, won’t I?”

Mom nodded. “I’ll call her tonight, and then you can talk to her tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Ava smiled at her mom. “I feel better already.” ♥ DEBORAH S. MARETT

### CONFESS SIN

**KEY VERSE:** PEOPLE WHO CONCEAL THEIR SINS WILL NOT PROSPER, BUT IF THEY CONFESS AND TURN FROM THEM, THEY WILL RECEIVE MERCY. PROVERBS 28:13 (NLT)

Do you feel uncomfortable about something you’ve done? When you feel guilty because you know you’ve done wrong, think of it as having your fur rubbed the wrong way. Sin goes against who you are as God’s child. But you don’t need to continue feeling guilty and uncomfortable. Confess what you’ve done to Jesus, and He will forgive you.

## THE SAFE

READ: PROVERBS 2:1-8

Uncle Frank is Dad’s uncle, right?” asked Ben as his mom unlocked the safe in Uncle Frank’s house and took a stack of yellowed papers from it.

“That’s right,” said Mom. She set aside one paper. “This has information the hospital needs for Uncle Frank’s records.” She put the other papers back in the safe and locked it. Then they left and went to the hospital.

While Mom took care of business in the hospital office, Ben went down the hall to Uncle Frank’s room. “Hi, Uncle Frank,” he said.

The elderly man raised his head from the pillow. “Uhhh,” he muttered, peering closely at Ben. “Oh,” he said after a moment. “It’s little Jimmy.”

Ben shook his head. “No, I’m Ben. Jim is my dad. He’s grown up now.” Uncle Frank looked puzzled and didn’t say anything. Not knowing what else to do, Ben took the bulletin he’d gotten at church that morning from his pocket and held it out. “Um...would you like to look at our church bulletin?”

Uncle Frank took the bulletin and held it close to his face. He began to read the verse printed at the top. “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High”—he put the paper down and closed his eyes—“will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” When Mom came into the room a little later, Uncle Frank had just finished reciting all of Psalm 91.

“Uncle Frank didn’t remember me. He thought I was Dad,” Ben said on the way home. “But he recited a whole chapter of the Bible! How could he remember all that when he didn’t even know me?”

“Old age often robs people of memory, but many elderly people can recall hymns and verses long after they forget almost everything else,” said Mom. “When you memorize God’s Word, you store it in your heart, and it’s available when you need it.”

“Like Uncle Frank’s papers were stored in the safe in his house?” asked Ben.

Mom smiled. “Something like that, only better. A safe in a house can be broken into, but treasures hidden in your heart can never be stolen from you. They’re always there to remind you that, no matter what happens to you, God’s promises are true and Jesus is always with you.” ♥ BARBARA J. WESTBERG



### MEMORIZE BIBLE VERSES

**KEY VERSE:** I HAVE HIDDEN YOUR WORD IN MY HEART. PSALM 119:11 (NIV)

Are you storing treasure in your heart? You can store up great riches by memorizing God’s Word. Think of each Bible verse you learn as a valuable treasure hidden in your heart. Even when you grow old, it will still be there to remind you of Jesus’s love for you and give you comfort and encouragement. Learn today’s Key Verse as a reminder of the importance of knowing God’s Word.

## TOP PRIORITY

READ: EXODUS 20:3; MATTHEW 22:35-38



Hey, Mom, I'm going over to Robby's to shoot some hoops," called Vincent as he bounded down the porch steps.

"Hold on, young man," said Mom. "I have some questions for you."

"Okay, but make it quick. The guys are waiting," Vincent said as he dribbled up and down the sidewalk.

"For starters, could you please hold that ball still for just a minute?" asked Mom. "Have you finished the chore list I gave you this morning?"

Vincent twirled the ball on his index finger. "Um, most of it."

"Did you do your Bible reading today?"

"Aww, Mom. Can't I just play ball with my friends for a while? I'll do that later."

"I know you think you'll get to it later, but from what I've seen lately, all you think about is basketball. You're either playing it, reading about it, or watching it."

"I think about other things," Vincent retorted. "You make it sound like I worship basketball."

"That's an interesting way to word it," Mom said. "Worship can be defined as excessive admiration for someone or something. And basketball seems to be all you care about."

Vincent stopped twirling the ball. "I guess that does sound bad."

"Playing basketball isn't bad. In fact, I'm glad you've found a sport you really enjoy. However, when it becomes the top priority above everything else, that's not good. The Bible warns us about how easily we can make gods out of things we love instead of worshiping the one true God, who gives us those good things. The first of the Ten Commandments says, 'You shall have no other gods before me.' That means Jesus should be your top priority. He's the one who saved you from sin and gave you eternal life. Basketball may bring you temporary happiness, but only Jesus can give you joy that lasts forever."

Vincent looked down at his basketball. He knew his mom was right. He had let basketball become more important than anything else. "I guess you're right," he said. "But it's hard. I want to follow Jesus, but I love playing basketball too."

Mom smiled. "You can follow Jesus *and* love basketball, Vincent. You just need to keep your priorities straight. Enjoy basketball as a gift from Him—but not at the expense of everything else." ♥ KENDRA ANGLE

## PUT JESUS FIRST

**KEY VERSE:** SEEK FIRST [GOD'S] KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL. MATTHEW 6:33 (NIV)

What's your top priority? It's easy to let sports, hobbies, or even friends become the most important thing in your life. Those are all things God gave us to enjoy, but none of them should become more important than Him. Jesus loves you, and He knows nothing can fulfill you apart from Him. Enjoy the gifts He's given you, but worship Him alone.