

THE MANGLED SLIPPER

READ: EPHESIANS 4:29; JAMES 3:5-10

Look what Otis did!” Maria showed her father her soggy, torn slipper. “I scolded him and put him outside.”

“I’m sorry, honey,” Dad said as he took the mangled slipper. “I can see that little puppy needs a lot more training.”

Mom spoke from the doorway. “Maria, Iris is on the phone for you.” She held out her phone.

A few minutes later, Maria’s voice boomed from the kitchen. “You always want me to do all the work, Iris. You’re so lazy! I’m never doing a school project with you again.”

“What was that about?” asked Mom when Maria returned her phone. “I thought Iris was your best friend.”

“She...she just caught me at a bad time,” mumbled Maria.

“Did your sister catch you at a bad time too?” asked Mom. “I heard you yell at her this morning.”

Maria blushed. “She always bothers me when I’m tired. But I told her I was sorry.” Maria brightened. “I’ll call Iris back and apologize to her.”

Just then Otis whined at the door. “I think Otis wants to come in and apologize too,” said Dad, handing the chewed-up slipper to Maria.

Maria looked at it. “Don’t let him in,” she grumbled crossly. “My slipper is ruined because of him.”

Dad nodded. “You know, Maria, even if you forgive Otis and let him in, it won’t fix your slipper. That’s mangled for good.”

“I know that,” said Maria. “That’s why I’m mad at him!”

“Well, feelings can be mangled just like your slipper,” said Dad. “Once you’ve said something, it really can’t be taken back. You can be sorry and say so, but the words have already hurt. Often there is no way to repair the damage.”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “There are several people you need to apologize to, but even if they forgive you, you’ve still hurt their feelings. You need to be more careful to control your tongue and not say hurtful things in the first place.”

“But I...I don’t know how,” said Maria.

“Think before you speak,” said Dad. “When you feel angry, count to ten before you say anything. Most of all, remember that Jesus gives you the ability to love others the way He does. Trust Him to help you speak in love, not anger.” ♥ HARRIETT A. DURRELL

USE YOUR WORDS IN A LOVING WAY

KEY VERSE: THE WORDS OF THE RECKLESS PIERCE LIKE SWORDS, BUT THE TONGUE OF THE WISE BRINGS HEALING. PROVERBS 12:18 (NIV)

Do you say things you don’t mean? It’s so easy to do. The Bible has a lot to say about how much trouble your tongue can cause. It also gives the cure—let the love of Christ in your heart control what you say. If you’ve had trouble controlling your tongue, apologize to those you’ve hurt. Then use your words to encourage others and solve problems in a loving way.

WHEN YOU HIT A CURB

READ: LUKE 6:43-45; GALATIANS 5:22-23

Mom!” Tucker shouted as he dashed into the house. “A dump truck just hit the curb, and now there’s a huge pile of gravel blocking our street! Come out and see it.”

“I can’t leave this pizza sauce right now,” Mom said as she sprinkled oregano into the bubbling red mixture she was stirring on the stove. “I’ll come out as soon as it’s finished.”

“Well, I hope they get rid of the gravel before Dad tries to come home,” said Tucker. “He won’t get past that pile on the road!”

“He may have to go a bit out of his way, but I’m sure he’ll find a way to get here,” said Mom.

By the time Dad came home, the road had been cleared. Tucker was kneading dough for the pizza crust as he told his dad the story of how the dump truck spilled its load. “All that gravel fell out when the truck hit the curb,” said Tucker. “Good thing they had a big scooper to clean up the mess.”

“Good thing.” Dad nodded thoughtfully. “You know, people are like that truck.”

“What?” Tucker asked in surprise. “How?”

“We all run into curbs at some point—bumpy times in our lives,” Dad explained. “When we do, whatever is in our hearts comes spilling out.”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “If we trust in Jesus and depend on Him to guide the way we think and act, His love in our lives will be evident to others by the way we treat them, even when things aren’t going so well. But if we ignore God and live life however we want, the pride and selfishness in our hearts comes spilling out when we face a difficult situation.”

Dad nodded as he tasted the pizza sauce and sprinkled a little more oregano into it. “When we hit a curb in life, the contents of our hearts spill out for everyone to see. That’s why it’s important to have a relationship with Jesus and trust Him to help us love others. Then when we face a bumpy situation, others will see that He’s filled our hearts with good things.” ♥ DALAN DECKER



SHOW LOVE IN HARD TIMES

KEY VERSE: WHAT PEOPLE SAY WITH THEIR MOUTHS COMES FROM WHAT FILLS THEIR HEARTS. LUKE 6:45 (ERV)

What happens when you hit a curb in the road of life? Do you look to Jesus for help? Or do you complain and lash out at those around you? You can often see the way people really are when they’re going through hardship. If you know Jesus as your Savior, you have His goodness and love in your heart. Trust Him to help you show it through your words and actions, even when the hard times come along.

THE DYNAMITE BLAST

READ: PSALM 34:4-9, 17-19; ROMANS 8:28

Lucy didn't feel like going on the class field trip to the rock quarry. She just wanted Ginger, her lost cat, to come home and her dad to get his job back. *I just want everything to be okay again*, she thought as she got off the bus with the rest of the kids.

The quarry foreman handed out hard hats to everyone. "We're going to have a dynamite blast today to loosen and break the stone in the quarry," he said, motioning to the other side of a large pit. A loud horn blared. "After the horn blasts three times, cover your ears!" the foreman called out. The horn sounded two more times, and then—**BOOM!** A loud explosion sent dust and rocks flying. Once the all-clear horn sounded, the foreman let the kids move closer so they could see what had happened. "Don't worry, kids. They've got it all under control," he said, pointing to the workers who controlled the operation and set off the blasts.

When Lucy got home, she picked up one of Ginger's cat toys as she told her mom about the quarry trip. "Sometimes I feel like everything's being blown apart here at home too," said Lucy.

"I know, honey. When bad things happen it can feel like our whole world is being blown to pieces. Maybe that's when we should remember the workers at the quarry."

"The workers?" asked Lucy. "Why them?"

"They made sure the blasts were safe and controlled, right?" asked Mom. Lucy nodded. "They remind us that someone is in control of our lives too—God. Nothing can happen to us unless He allows it, and He promises to be with us and see us through whatever experiences we face."

"But why does He let bad things happen—like Ginger getting lost and Dad losing his job?" asked Lucy.

"Well, there's no easy answer to that, but remember the workers need the explosions in the quarry to loosen the stone, otherwise they wouldn't be able to get it out. Perhaps God allows explosions in our lives at times to loosen our hearts and get good things out—things like growing in our relationship with Jesus and showing His love to others who are going through hard times." ♥ NANCE E. KEYES

GOD IS IN CONTROL

KEY VERSE: THE RIGHTEOUS PERSON MAY HAVE MANY TROUBLES, BUT THE LORD DELIVERS HIM FROM THEM ALL. PSALM 34:19 (NIV)

Have you had difficult things happen to you recently? It's okay to feel sad about it, but remember that God is in complete control. Jesus understands how you feel because He suffered too, and He'll be with you through whatever hard situations you have to face. Trust Him to bring good things into your life out of difficulties and to use them to make you more like Him.

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STORING UP

READ: PSALM 119:9-16

Look, Dad,” said Tristan. “A chipmunk!”

Dad joined Tristan at the window and together they watched the little creature strip an ear of corn from the compost pile. “Look at him peel off those kernels!” said Tristan. “He eats fast!”

“He’s not eating them,” said Dad. “He’s stuffing the kernels into little pouches in his cheeks. Watch what he does with them now.”

Tristan watched as the chipmunk scurried over to the woodpile. He laughed when he saw what the little rodent did next. “He’s using his hind foot to push the corn out of his cheeks!”

“He’s storing it in spaces between the chunks of wood so it’ll be there when he needs it later on,” Dad explained.

Tristan and his dad watched for several minutes as the tiny animal dashed back and forth from the ear of corn to the woodpile. “I can’t believe how much he can store in his cheeks!” Tristan said after a few minutes. “He’s got all the kernels stripped from the cob already.”

Dad nodded. “You know, Tristan, God has built a storage system into us too.”

“I don’t have any pouches in my cheeks to carry food,” said Tristan, laughing at the idea.

Dad grinned at him. “I was thinking of a different kind of food—spiritual food. You store it in your heart, not in your cheeks.”

“Spiritual food?” asked Tristan. “Oh, you mean like the Bible verses I have to learn for church, right?”

“Exactly,” said Dad. “The Bible calls it hiding God’s Word in our hearts. As we meditate on God’s Word by learning what the Bible says and storing its truth in our hearts, it helps strengthen us spiritually. When we store it away, God brings it back to our minds when we need it. It can help us in times of trial or testing—like when we’re going through a difficult situation or when we’re tempted to sin—by reminding us of God’s love and the power and hope He’s given us through Jesus.”

Dad nodded toward the chipmunk. “The corn being stored by that little guy will be there for him when he needs it in the cold winter months, and the verses we memorize will be there whenever we need them.” ♥ TRULA H. BENSINGER

MEMORIZE BIBLE VERSES

KEY VERSE: YOUR WORD I HAVE HIDDEN IN MY HEART,
THAT I MIGHT NOT SIN AGAINST YOU. PSALM 119:11

Are you storing God’s Word in your heart? Are you reading the Bible, studying it at church, and memorizing verses so you can carry His truth and promises with you wherever you go? Memorizing verses is a great way to store God’s Word in your mind and heart so it will always be there, ready for whenever you need it. A good way to memorize a verse is to read it out loud three times a day for a week—by the end of the week, you probably won’t even have to look at the page!

GOD WITH YOU

READ: JOHN 14:15-27; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Kenna wrapped her arms around Milo, her orange tabby cat. A single tear slipped onto her kitty's furry face. Kenna felt more tears inside her, but she was tired from crying every day for the past week, and she didn't know if any more tears would come. "God, I miss my Mom. Why did you take her to heaven?" Kenna's whispered words hung in the air.

Mom had been sick for a couple of weeks, and everyone had been praying. Even when she went to the hospital, Kenna had been a little scared, but she really thought her mom would come home. "I feel so alone." Kenna rubbed her cheek against Milo's soft fur. She thought about her mom's smile—so bright, always full of joy, even when she had to go through her many surgeries over the years.

Kenna remembered her mom reading the Bible to her just a few months back. "Kenna-girl, do you know how much God loves you?" Mom had cupped Kenna's face in her hands. "I want you to remember that He is always with you. What did we just read in John chapter fourteen about how we know God is with us?"

"He gave us the Holy Spirit."

"That's right! Because you belong to Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit in you to be with you and remind you of everything He has said. He will never leave you, and He gives you His peace."

Kenna pulled out her pink Bible and found John 14. She read verse 18—*I will not leave you as orphans*. "God, I feel so alone because I really miss my mom. Will you keep reminding me of what You say—that You will never leave me? I'm not an orphan because I have You. Will you give my mom a big hug from me and tell her I'm going to shine my light for You just like she did?"

Kenna hugged her cat close. "Milo, I'm sad Mom isn't here anymore, but I have hope because I know she's in heaven with Jesus, and He promises He'll never leave either one of us." Kenna scratched Milo's chin as he purred. "One day, I will see Mom again and give her the biggest hug ever! I may feel alone right now, but I know Jesus is with me." ♥ SAVANNAH COLEMAN

GOD IS WITH YOU ALWAYS

KEY VERSE: THE LORD HIMSELF GOES BEFORE YOU AND WILL BE WITH YOU; HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU. DO NOT BE AFRAID; DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED. DEUTERONOMY 31:8 (NIV)

Have you ever lost someone you love? When someone close to you dies, sorrow and the feeling of being alone can seem like it's never going to end. If you're a child of God, you have hope to hold on to. You are never alone because Jesus is always with you. He will be with you in your loneliness and sorrow, and one day He will wipe all your tears away (Revelation 21:3-4).