

BEAN PIE

READ: PSALM 25:16-22; MATTHEW 11:28; PHILIPPIANS 4:13

“What are you doing?” asked Jonie, astonished to see her grandmother spilling beans into a pie crust.

“I’m using uncooked beans as weights so my crust will bake evenly,” answered Grandma. She slid it into the oven and set the timer.

Jonie laughed. “I thought you were making bean pie!”

Grandma smiled. “No, beans add pressure so no air gets inside to puff up the pastry. My crust will bake beautifully once the real filling replaces the beans.” She pointed at a bowl of green apples. “There’s our filling. Would you like to peel those?”

“Sure. Apple pie sounds way better than bean pie!” Jonie got to work with the peeler. “I love your baking, Grandma. It never affects my allergies.”

Cutting the fruit, Grandma said, “It must be hard keeping track of what’s in your food.”

Jonie raised her hand. Counting on her fingers, she listed, “Nuts, eggs, tomatoes, and seafood.” She returned to her task. “It’s not fair. Some people only have one allergy or none at all.”

The timer beeped. Using oven mitts, Grandma removed the crust. She dumped the beans into a bowl. Setting the crust aside, she returned to slicing the apples. “We all have difficult situations—burdens—that weigh us down. Jesus knows our burdens. When He came to earth, He experienced hard things too. We can trust Him to give us the strength we need to face them, even if we don’t understand why.” She added sugar and cinnamon to the fruit. “Whether our burdens are big or small, Jesus is with us, and we can rely on Him for help. He willingly took on the biggest burden of all—our sin—so we could be free from all our troubles one day when He comes again.” She stirred salt and lemon juice into the mixture. “Sometimes it may seem unfair to have difficulties, but they can make us stronger and prepare us to become who God intended us to be.”

As Grandma transferred the apple filling to the crust, Jonie exclaimed, “It’s like those beans! Your pastry needed them to get ready for the apples, otherwise it wouldn’t become a delicious apple pie.”

Grandma’s smile widened. “Right. The beans helped the crust take shape for something better—the apples.”

“Don’t forget the ice cream!” added Jonie. ♥ ELENA DEE

JESUS KNOWS YOUR TROUBLES

KEY VERSE: YOU CAN HAVE PEACE IN ME [JESUS]. IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLES. BUT BE BRAVE! I HAVE DEFEATED THE WORLD! JOHN 16:33 (ERV)

Are you facing difficulties? Do you wonder why you have them in the first place? Jesus knows your challenges and why you have them. He can use your burdens to help you grow in your relationship with Him and shape you into the person you were meant to be. Rely on Jesus to give you strength to face your troubles. He is with you every step of the way.

WATERED-DOWN CHRISTIANS

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18; REVELATION 3:15-19

Mom, what's wrong with these ice cubes?" asked Nora. "They're all brown!" Mom glanced at the dark cubes and grinned. "I used iced tea to make those," she explained. "I made them for Grandpa. You know how he loves good, strong iced tea on hot summer days."

Nora smiled at her grandfather, who sat at the kitchen table. She knew he disliked his tea watery and weak, the way it got when too many ice cubes melted in it. She popped several of the brown cubes into a tall glass and poured fresh iced tea over them. "Here you go, Grandpa. Good, strong tea, unspoiled by ordinary ice cubes."

"Thanks, Nora," said Grandpa, taking the tea. "Just the way I like it." He took a big gulp and let out a sigh. "Now, what can these ice cubes teach us about living the Christian life?"

Mom and Nora exchanged knowing glances. Grandpa seemed to be able to find a spiritual lesson in almost anything.

"Well," said Nora, "I guess ice cubes made out of tea keep your iced tea tasting strong, and we want to stay strong as Christians, right?"

"Right," said Grandpa. "When you use regular ice cubes, they melt and the tea becomes diluted—weak and tasteless. We don't want to be diluted Christians, do we?" He took another sip of tea. "What kinds of things might water us down if we're not careful?"

"Hmm," said Nora. "Maybe going along with what everyone else is doing just to fit in?"

Grandpa nodded. "When we allow the opinions of others to determine what we think and do instead of God, it makes us weak and ineffective. The Bible tells us to separate ourselves from the world. That means we should think and act differently from those around us who don't know Jesus. Instead of looking for worth and contentment in the things of this world, we need to look to Jesus, who loves us so much He died on the cross to save us."

Grandpa finished his tea and then shook the glass, making the brown ice cubes at the bottom rattle. "You can't follow both Jesus and the world—one will eventually water down the other. We need to remember that we belong to Jesus and trust Him to help us stay strong as we follow Him." ♥ LOIS A. TEUFEL

FOLLOW JESUS, NOT THE WORLD

KEY VERSE: COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. 2 CORINTHIANS 6:17

Can others tell you're different by the way you live? While the world may tell us that what we own or what people think of us is what gives us value, the Bible tells us to look to Jesus for our worth—and we're worth so much to Him that He died to save us. Don't water down your life with the things of this world. Follow what Jesus says and trust Him to help you reflect His love in your life.

THE CHICKEN AND THE EAGLE

READ: JOHN 15:9-10; ROMANS 6:11-14

Are you enjoying your book?" asked Mom as Bailey curled up on the couch with a book of folktales.

"Yeah," said Bailey. "I just finished a story about a baby eagle who thought he was a little chick."

"Why did he think that?" asked her little brother, Luke.

"Well, when he was still inside an egg, the egg was stolen and taken to the henhouse," Bailey explained. "The hen didn't know it wasn't one of hers, and she sat on it with the rest of her eggs. After the egg hatched, she brought him up like one of her chicks."

"Someone should've told him he was an eagle," said Luke.

"Someone did tell him!" said Bailey. "The wise old owl who lived near the farm told him he was an eaglet—and that he could fly high in the sky like the great eagle—but he didn't believe it. He just kept on living like a chicken almost until the day he died."

"That was dumb of him!" said Luke. "He could have soared the skies, and all he did was scratch the dirt!"

"We do that too sometimes," remarked Mom.

"We scratch in the dirt?" asked Bailey. "I don't do that."

"Me neither," Luke shook his head.

"Not literally," said Mom. "But like that eagle, we often fail to realize our full potential. The Bible says we were all once slaves to sin. Then Jesus came to save us and set us free from the power of sin."

"And that means we don't have to keep on sinning?" asked Bailey.

Mom nodded. "Because we trust in Jesus, God has given us the power to say no to sin. But like that little eagle who lived the life of a chicken, we often choose to live as though we can't help but do wrong things. That's more foolish than he was, don't you think?" Bailey and Luke nodded. "We've been set free and don't need to be ruled by sin any longer," said Mom. "When we realize that something we're doing is wrong, we can stop immediately and confess our sin to Jesus, who always forgives us. We don't have to stay stuck in sinful habits—Jesus has freed us from sin so we can soar with Him!" ♥ TANYA FERDINANDUSZ



GOD GIVES POWER TO SAY NO TO SIN

KEY VERSE: THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS HAS MADE ME FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH. ROMANS 8:2

Did you know that if you trust Jesus as your Savior you have the power to say no to sin? You don't have to give in to it because Jesus has freed you from sin and it doesn't control you anymore. When you're tempted to do something that's wrong, remember that you can say no, and trust God to help you do what's right instead. Thank Him for freeing you from sin and for making His power available to you!

OCEAN OF LOVE

READ: ROMANS 8:35-39; 1 JOHN 1:9

It was a beautiful day for a picnic at the beach. The Patel family spread out a blanket and put up sun umbrellas in their favorite spot. Then Mira and Priya dashed for the water, but Ari looked fearfully at the waves. “The water is so scary today,” he murmured.

“Oh, come on in,” called Mira. “The waves are fun. Don’t be so scared.”

But Ari shook his head. He sat down on the beach and began to build a sand castle. “Dad...” he began hesitantly. His voice trembled as he continued, “I feel awful inside. I don’t think God loves me anymore.”

“God has never quit loving you for a minute in your whole life,” Dad said, turning to look at him. “What makes you think He has?”

“Well, my Bible club verse this week says, ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God.’ That must mean I have to do stuff to keep God loving me, but I don’t think I’ve done that.” Ari looked at the ground. “I’m sure I haven’t. I lied to you and Mom one day last week, remember?”

“Yes, but you confessed that to us, and we forgave you,” said Dad. “When you confess your sin to God, He forgives you too. God never stops loving you.” Dad waved a hand toward the ocean. “God’s love is something like the ocean. Just think of how much water there is out there, but you’re not enjoying any of it. Why not?”

“Because the waves are so big, and they scare me.”

“Exactly, so you’re not in it,” said Dad. “Your fear of the big waves keeps you from enjoying the water. And your fear that God is unhappy with you is keeping you from enjoying His love. But His love for you is there, just as it’s always been.”

“But what about that verse?” asked Ari.

“The Bible doesn’t say, ‘Keep God loving you,’” said Dad. “It says, ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God.’ There’s nothing you could ever do to make God stop loving you, Ari. Jesus died for you so you could live without fear, knowing your sins are forgiven. His love for you is always there. To enjoy it, remember that you are His child and that nothing can separate you from Him.” ♥

MARY ROSE PEARSON

GOD NEVER STOPS LOVING YOU

KEY VERSE: KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD, WAITING EXPECTANTLY FOR THE MERCY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST FOR ETERNAL LIFE. JUDE 1:21 (CSB)

Do you ever wonder if God still loves you when you sin? Maybe you cheated, lied, made fun of someone, or did something else you knew was wrong. God always loves you, and nothing you do will ever change that. He loves you so much that Jesus died for you so your sins could be forgiven and you could have eternal life with Him. Confess your sin to Him and accept His forgiveness. Then enjoy the ocean of love He has for you.

THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

READ: ISAIAH 58:11; JOHN 4:13-14; 7:37-39

Are you packed and ready to go?" Macy's mom called. "I'm ready!" Macy exclaimed as she came bounding down the stairs carrying her backpack. She couldn't wait to spend the weekend with Mimi and Pop on their small farm and help them plant a vegetable garden. Macy and her parents lived in a townhouse in the city, so being out in the wide-open countryside was a real treat for her.

After Mom dropped her off, Mimi helped Macy get her things unpacked and then they headed out to plant the garden.

"Here, you hold the seeds and the hoe while I get the wheelbarrow and dirt," Mimi said.

Pop had already plowed the garden area for them, so they were set to start planting. As they planted the seeds, Mimi talked about how they would need to make sure the garden was properly watered and weeded until harvest time.

Macy sighed. "That sounds like a lot of work."

"It is," said Mimi. "But it will be worth it when you see and taste those vegetables."

Macy giggled. "My mouth is already watering!"

Mom and Mimi made a plan for Macy to come over every Saturday morning during the growing season to help weed and water the garden. Macy worked hard in the garden all summer, and boy, did it pay off! They ended up with a good crop of vegetables and a couple of juicy watermelons.

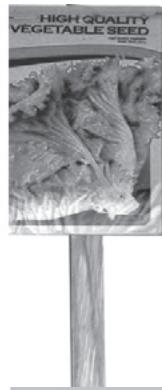
"Was all the work worth it?" Pop asked.

"Definitely!" Macy said as she took another big bite of watermelon.

Pop grinned. "Did you know that our lives are like a vegetable garden, Macy? Just like we had to keep the garden watered and weeded so the vegetables would be healthy and grow, we need Jesus to water us spiritually. He does that the moment we put our trust in Him, and He continues to water us with His love and grace throughout our lives."

"I sure did enjoy working in the garden with you this summer," said Macy. "I'm glad Jesus is working in my life so I can grow just like our vegetables!" ♥

LISA FULLER



JESUS WATERS US SPIRITUALLY

KEY VERSE: THE LORD WILL GUIDE YOU CONTINUALLY, GIVING YOU WATER WHEN YOU ARE DRY AND RESTORING YOUR STRENGTH. YOU WILL BE LIKE A WELL-WATERED GARDEN, LIKE AN EVER-FLOWING SPRING. ISAIAH 58:11 (NLT)

Are you like a well-watered garden? In today's Bible reading, John 7:38 says that Jesus provides us with living water. When we trust Him as our Savior, He gives us the Holy Spirit, who works in our lives and helps us grow in our faith so we can produce fruit of God's love for others to enjoy. As you learn more about Jesus and listen to the truth of God's Word, trust Him to help you grow in the love and knowledge of the Lord.