

THE PURPLE FLOWER

READ: MATTHEW 5:15-16

On a sunny summer afternoon, Kayla and her parents decided to take a walk through the woods. When they first moved to the farm, Dad had cleared a path that looped through the woods at the back of their property.

Kayla loved walking in the woods with her parents. She would often just stand still and take in the sounds and smells of the forest. It was always so peaceful and beautiful.

As she rounded a curve in the path, something caught Kayla's eye. "Mom, Dad, come look at this!" she called.

Mom and Dad walked over to where Kayla was standing. On the ground, nestled between a bunch of leaves and sticks, was a bright purple flower.

"Wow, that flower was hidden well," Dad said.

Mom nodded. "If you hadn't been standing right there, we would have missed it."

"It's too pretty to just leave hidden out here. Can I pick it and take it home?"

Kayla asked.

Mom checked her phone to make sure it was okay to pick, and then Kayla carefully picked the flower and held on to it as they continued on around the path. Once they reached the house, Kayla grabbed a vase from under the kitchen sink, filled it with water, and placed the flower in it. She set the vase on the table so they all could enjoy it.

"It's so beautiful!" Kayla exclaimed.

During devotions that evening, Dad read some verses from the book of Matthew. "You know, that flower you found in the woods today is a good example of this Bible lesson," he said when he finished reading. "The flower was just so bright and beautiful that you couldn't leave it hidden in the woods. You wanted everyone to see it. Well, this verse is saying that's what we're like as Christians. We have the light of Jesus in us, and we shouldn't try to hide it. We need to shine bright like that flower so that others can see the beauty of His love in our lives."

That night when Kayla went to bed, she prayed that the Lord would help her be a shining light for Him. She wanted others to see Jesus in her life. ♥ LISA FULLER



BE A LIGHT FOR JESUS

KEY VERSE: YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD—LIKE A CITY ON A HILLTOP THAT CANNOT BE HIDDEN. MATTHEW 5:14 (NLT)

Does your life reflect the light of Jesus? Can others see Him when they look at you? As Christians, it's important for us to be a light for Jesus. Others should be able to see His love and goodness in the way we treat them and know that He makes a difference in our lives. Don't keep your light hidden—shine brightly for Jesus today and every day!

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

READ: 2 PETER 1:3-9

Calvin waited with his father at the airport. Soon they were greeting their friend Mr. Sato, who had come from Japan to visit.

When they arrived home, Mr. Sato handed Calvin a package. Calvin eagerly opened it, but he wasn't sure what it was. "I'll help you put that together," Mr. Sato said. "If it's okay with your dad, we can go out to the backyard and assemble it now."

"Sure," said Dad, so they went out and got busy fitting pieces together. When it was finished, three plastic fish billowed in the wind at the end of a bamboo pole.

"In Japan we have a special day for children," Mr. Sato told them. "We set up a pole with a fish—a carp like this—waving from it. The carp is a determined fish. It swims upstream and overcomes obstacles. One of the things we teach our children is to be brave and strong like that." Mr. Sato paused. "But many kids in Japan don't know they need Jesus," he added sadly. "They don't know they need Him to set them free from sin and make them strong enough to swim upstream and do what's right even if other kids don't." He smiled at Calvin. "I'm glad you know Jesus, Calvin. I hope you'll remember to trust Him to give you the strength you need to swim against the current."

When Calvin got into bed, he thought about the carp swimming upstream. *I wonder if I'd be able to swim upstream if my friends tried to talk me into doing something I know I shouldn't,* he thought. *Some of the things we've been doing lately haven't been all that good, but I don't want them to think I'm a wimp.* He was still wondering about it when he fell asleep.

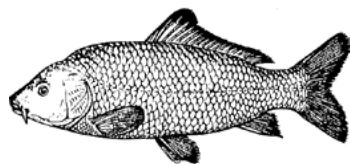
At school the next day, his friend Grant approached him. "Hey, some of us are gonna skip gym class and walk over to the park. Mr. Tillman never takes attendance, so no one will know. You in?"

Calvin took a deep breath and said a silent prayer. Then he shook his head. "No, I'm not going to do stuff like that anymore." *There, I said it!* he thought. *Thanks, Jesus, for helping me swim upstream.* ♥ MATILDA H. NORDTVEDT

SAY NO TO WRONG THINGS

KEY VERSE: BE STRONG IN THE LORD AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT.
EPHESIANS 6:10

Do you do what other kids do because you're afraid they'll make fun of you if you don't? Any fish can float downstream, but it takes a strong one to swim against the current. If you know Jesus as your Savior, He has given you that strength. When you're tempted to do something wrong, trust Him to help you swim upstream and do the right thing.



INSTANT ANSWERS

READ: PSALM 25:1-5; LAMENTATIONS 3:24-26

I don't really see the use of praying about things," Abigail said as she hobbled to the refrigerator one morning. "I've been praying my sprained ankle would heal, but God hasn't answered my prayer." She rummaged around in the fridge. "Where's the orange juice?"

"I'm afraid we ran out," said Mom. "But there are some oranges in there—why don't you squeeze one of those?"

Abigail shook her head. "That takes too long," she said, shutting the refrigerator door. "I'll just buy some from the vending machine at school."

"Mom!" Jude called out from the family room. "The internet's not working again!" Mom and Abigail heard him get up to restart the wireless router. "This thing is so annoying," he grumbled loudly.

Abigail groaned. "That router needs to be replaced. Even when it does work, the internet's really slow. It took me *forever* to look up facts about mammals for my science homework last night."

"Really?" said Mom. "It took you *forever*?"

"Well, twenty minutes."

Mom smiled and shook her head. "It sounds like our gotta-have-it-now culture is giving you and Jude an instant gratification mentality." She eyed Abigail thoughtfully. "And judging from what you said a few minutes ago, it sounds like that attitude might be creeping into your prayer life too!"

Abigail frowned. "What's an instant gratification mentality?"

"It's when we're so used to having things right away that the smallest delay becomes unacceptable to us—like having an internet connection that's not lightning-fast or taking a few minutes to squeeze an orange," Mom explained. "It can make us think God should answer our prayers instantly too."

Abigail shrugged. "Okay, but we're supposed to expect answers, aren't we?"

"Yes, but asking God for answers to prayer isn't the same as looking up answers to homework on the internet," said Mom. "God's timing doesn't always match ours—He is much more patient than we are. Jesus patiently walks with us through the difficult circumstances we face in life—such as a sprained ankle that needs time to heal—so we can learn to trust Him and become more like Him. When we remember how patient and caring He is with us, we can be patient and wait for His answers. They'll come when the time is right." ♥ TANYA FERDINANDUSZ

WAIT FOR GOD'S ANSWERS

KEY VERSE: GUIDE ME IN YOUR TRUTH AND TEACH ME, FOR YOU ARE THE GOD OF MY SALVATION; I WAIT FOR YOU ALL DAY LONG. PSALM 25:5 (CSB)

Do you have an instant gratification mentality? Do you always want things right now—if not sooner? There's nothing wrong with using modern conveniences that save us time and effort, but God's timing is different from our fast-paced world. Trust Him to help you be patient like He is as you bring your requests to Him in prayer and to answer at the time He knows is best.

DADDY'S GIRL

READ: ROMANS 12:9-18; GALATIANS 4:6-7

Mom, who do I look like?" asked Avia while her mother braided her hair. "Who do you look like?" repeated Mom. "Well, let's see." Mom gently tugged on Avia's hair. "Duck," she said.

"I look like a duck?" Avia laughed, knowing Mom meant for her to tip her head so she could braid the hair at the bottom of her neck.

Mom laughed too, then took a long look at both their faces in the mirror. "Actually, that's an easy question. You look more like your father—more so every day." Avia's father had died when she was very small. "You remind me of your dad so much. You not only resemble him in appearance; you act like him too. You eat just as fast as he did," Mom teased as they walked to the kitchen to fix breakfast.

"Isn't it weird that I hardly knew Dad, but now I look like him and act like him?" Avia asked as she set the table. "You always say I like the same foods he did—asparagus and beets and even sandwiches with pickles and peanut butter on them! I wonder how come I'm so much like him when he's not here for me to copy?"

"I believe you do those things naturally because Dad is a part of you. He's passed on some of his characteristics to you—like similar taste buds," said Mom as she poured apple juice. "You also act like him in other ways because you've heard stories about him and have started doing some of the same things he used to do—like seeing how many old cars you can spot on a road trip." She smiled at Avia. "It's kind of like what happens when someone becomes a child of God."

"You mean because He's our heavenly Father, but we don't see Him—just like I don't see Dad?" asked Avia.

Mom nodded. "We don't see God, but we act like Him because the Holy Spirit—who is God—lives in us. We read about God in the Bible and see glimpses of Him in the lives of other Christians. And we talk about what He does in our lives." Mom squeezed Avia's hand. "With God's help, we become more and more like our heavenly Father every day!" ♥ DAWN E. MALONEY

LIVE LIKE A CHILD OF GOD

KEY VERSE: IMITATE GOD, THEREFORE, IN EVERYTHING YOU DO, BECAUSE YOU ARE HIS DEAR CHILDREN. EPHESIANS 5:1 (NLT)

Can others tell that God is your heavenly Father by the way you live? Do your words and actions make it easy for people to identify you as a child of God? Today's Bible reading lists a number of things that describe how God's children should live. Trust the Lord to develop these characteristics in your life so others will see your heavenly Father in you.

WHO'S KEEPING THE KANGAROO?

READ: JOHN 10:27-29



You look sad, Kevin. What are you thinking about?" Mom finished drying her hands on the kitchen towel she was holding and hung it back up on the rack.

"Well..." Kevin gulped. "Remember how I got saved in Sunday school a few months ago? Well, I think I might not be saved anymore! I keep doing bad things. I disobey you all the time. I lied to my teacher about my homework. I said something mean to Justin when we were playing that video game the other day.

Justin says I'm going to lose my salvation if I keep doing all these bad things!"

Mom was quiet for a moment, then she said, "Let's go to the park."

Kevin wiped his nose on his sleeve and slid off the couch. He grabbed his battered stuffed kangaroo and headed to the park with his mom.

"Better leave Joey with me," Mom said when they got to the park. "You don't want to lose him on the playground."

Kevin reluctantly handed his kangaroo over to his mom for safekeeping. Then he ran off to play.

Later, at home, Kevin started crying. "Mom! I can't find Joey anywhere! I think I lost him at the park. Now he's gone forever and I'll never see him again!"

"You didn't lose him. I was keeping him for you, remember?" She pulled the stuffed animal out of her bag and handed him to Kevin.

Kevin grabbed Joey and squished him to his chest. He was so happy his favorite little friend wasn't lost!

"Kevin," Mom said, "remember how you were asking about losing your salvation? This is a good illustration of how salvation works. When you trusted Jesus as your Savior, He forgave your sins and gave you eternal life as a child of God. That's what salvation is—the promise that we have been freed from sin's power and will live with God forever as His people. If you had to keep your salvation safe all by yourself, you would lose it. But Jesus not only gives us salvation for free—He is also the one who keeps it for us! You can't lose your salvation because Jesus is holding it for you." ♥ KRISTI VAN WINKLE

JESUS HOLDS YOUR SALVATION

KEY VERSE: I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY WILL NEVER PERISH. NO ONE WILL SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. JOHN 10:28 (CSB)

Are you afraid of losing your salvation? Do you worry that if you do too many bad things you won't be a Christian anymore? Your salvation is not based on anything you do—it's a gift from God, and you don't ever have to worry about losing it! You're God's child now, and nothing will change that. When you do something that's wrong, He will forgive you and help you do better. Jesus is the one who holds your salvation, and He promises to keep it safe.