

## HEAVY BURDENS

READ: JOHN 16:33; REVELATION 21:1-5

Rowan walked out of his bedroom and rubbed his eyes. He was surprised to see Mom sitting at their small kitchen table. Usually she was in bed by the time he woke up for school, but this morning she sat, still in her uniform, looking weary.

“Hey, Mom,” he greeted her. “What are you still doing awake? Aren’t you tired?” Rowan’s mom was a paramedic, and she worked the night shift driving an ambulance.

She gave him half a smile. “I wasn’t ready to go to sleep,” she said. “A lot of things happened while I was at work tonight, and I just needed a little time to... process all of them.”

Rowan nodded. Ever since his family had moved into the city, Mom’s job had gotten a lot more difficult. She saw scary things every day. Sometimes he’d overhear his parents talking about his mom’s job. Her ambulance was called to help people who were hurt from drugs or gunshot wounds or car accidents. He knew his mom had to feel scared or sad a lot of the time.

He wrapped his arms around her. “I’m sorry, Mom.” He wasn’t sure how to comfort her. He hated seeing his mom so discouraged.

When Rowan finally pulled away to grab himself some cereal, he thought about what might encourage him if he were in Mom’s position, and then he smiled. “You know, Mom, Mr. Rob from church read us a cool passage from Revelation on Sunday. It was all about how when Jesus comes back there will be no more death or crying or pain. Mr. Rob told us that Jesus is going to make everything new.”

He watched his mom’s eyes get misty, like she was right on the edge of crying.

“He also told us,” Rowan went on, “that even though the world can be dark and scary and unfair sometimes, we have hope that Jesus will make everything perfect again someday because we trust in Him.”

Mom swiped at her eyes with the sleeve of her uniform. “I think the Holy Spirit brought the perfect encouragement to me this morning,” she said with a shaky voice. “Thank you.”

Rowan smiled, and Mom hugged him again. “Maybe we can read that passage over breakfast, and then I think I’ll get some rest.” ♥ EMILY TENTER

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### JESUS IS GOING TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!

**KEY VERSE:** THERE WILL BE NO MORE DEATH OR MOURNING OR CRYING OR PAIN, FOR THE OLD ORDER OF THINGS HAS PASSED AWAY.  
REVELATION 21:4 (NIV)

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Are you ever discouraged by the things that are happening in the world? Sometimes all the brokenness around us can feel like heavy burdens on our shoulders. Does it encourage you to know that Jesus is coming someday to make everything perfect and new again? If you trust Him as your Savior, you have hope because He defeated sin and death and promises that you will share in an eternity with Him that is perfect and complete.

## GOD'S GEAR

READ: EPHESIANS 6:13-18

Tate walked into the house, his arms loaded. “Mom, I’m all signed up for football,” he said, dropping a big pile of football gear on the table.

“Great!” said Mom. She picked up a mouthpiece from the table. “What’s this?”

Tate grinned. “It protects my teeth. We wear heavy padding, shin guards, helmets, mouthpieces—all kinds of protection.”

“I’m glad to hear that!” Mom said. “Don’t forget any of it.”

“I won’t,” Tate assured her. “I’ve already learned how important it is. I forgot my mouthpiece when I went to practice the other day, and Coach Grimes wouldn’t let me play without it, so I had to go get it. Good thing too. When I got back, I got a good knock on my chin in the very first play. I could have gotten hurt without it.”

That evening, Tate showed his football gear to his dad. “I wore all that stuff back when I played football too,” Dad told him. “In fact, I still wear special protective gear.” Dad grinned at Tate’s look of surprise. “It’s called the armor of God. Do you know what the various pieces are?”

“Oh, that,” said Tate. “One of them is a helmet—the helmet of salvation. We get it by trusting Jesus to save us from sin.”

Mom nodded. “And one is called the breastplate of righteousness. We wear it by remembering that Jesus has made us right with God. Let’s see...another says to buckle truth around our waists. That means we need to use God’s truth to defend ourselves against Satan’s lies.”

“And our feet need to be ready to take us places where we can share the good news of Jesus with others,” added Tate.

“I know one!” five-year-old Larson said enthusiastically. “We need swords. My teacher said the Bible is our sword.”

“Good!” said Mom. “The Bible tells us the truth about God and who we are in Jesus. We also need the shield of faith so we can trust God no matter what.”

“Why do we need all that equipment?” asked Dad.

“Because Satan wants us to take our eyes off Jesus and give in to sin and doubt,” said Tate.

Dad nodded. “Right. The armor of God is even more important than your football gear, Tate. It protects us from Satan, our worst enemy.” ♥ DORIS BANTJES

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### WEAR GOD'S ARMOR

**KEY VERSE:** PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD SO THAT YOU CAN STAND AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL. EPHESIANS 6:11 (CSB)

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Are you wearing the armor of God? Have you put on the helmet of salvation by trusting Jesus as your Savior? When Satan whispers lies and tries to get you to sin or doubt, do you stand firm in the truth of Jesus? Do you remember that He has made you right with God and have faith that He is with you no matter what? Do you share that truth with others? Put on God's armor so you can stand strong against the devil.

## THE DIRTY DIAPER

READ: TITUS 3:3-7

**E**w, Dad, that stinks!” Kallie held her nose dramatically. Dad placed her baby brother on the changing table and unzipped his jammies. “Cash just needs a diaper change, that’s all.” He smiled down at the baby who wriggled on the mat. “Let’s get you cleaned up, buddy.”

Kallie looked on as Dad worked on cleaning up the baby. She scrunched her nose and frowned. “I don’t know how you can do that every day,” she said. “Don’t you and mom ever get tired of changing his diaper?”

Dad chuckled. “Well, Kallie, I won’t lie to you, I didn’t always have a very good attitude about changing diapers. When you were a baby, I may have even grumbled a few times.”

“Was I as stinky as Cash?” Kallie asked.

“Maybe even stinkier!” Dad teased.

“Why don’t you still have a bad attitude?” Kallie asked.

Dad fastened the new diaper onto his son and zipped up the jammies. “It wasn’t anything I did,” he said. “But over time, as I changed more and more diapers, the Lord reminded me of something.” Dad picked up Cash and gave him a kiss on his chubby cheek. “He helped me realize that He does something similar for me.”

Kallie raised her eyebrows, confused about what Dad could mean.

“Cash isn’t able to keep himself clean,” Dad said. “He’s just a baby! He needs someone to wash all the icky stuff off his skin and put him in a fresh diaper. That’s sort of how it is with me. The Lord helped me realize that just like a baby needs someone to clean them, I needed Jesus to clean me of my sin. It’s not something I can do on my own. Jesus washed me clean and made me a new person when I trusted in Him, and He continues to show me His grace and forgiveness each day.”

“And so you don’t mind changing diapers now because doing it reminds you of Jesus?”

“That’s right. It’s always an opportunity for me to remember how much my Father in heaven loves me, and how His mercy and grace cleanse me from all my sin.” ♥ EMILY TENTER




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### JESUS WASHES AWAY OUR SIN

**KEY VERSE:** IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

1 JOHN 1:9

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Have you experienced the cleansing forgiveness of Jesus? It’s impossible to clean ourselves from sin and make ourselves worthy of eternal life with God. Only Jesus can do that! Because of His life, sacrifice on the cross, and victory over death, He has the power to take away our sin and make us clean. Has he done that for you?

## SHELTER IN THE STORM

READ: PSALMS 61:3-4; 121:1-8

**D**ark clouds covered the sky, and thunder boomed in the distance. “Look at Henny-Penny, Mom.” Josie pointed to the chicken near a little coop by the barn. “She’s clucking for her chicks. I guess she wants to protect them from the storm.”

The mother hen stood in the doorway of the coop, clucking loudly, and the chicks ran to her from all directions. Josie watched as Henny-Penny led her chicks into the coop and settled down, covering them with her wings. A heavy gust of wind and a spattering of rain sent Josie and her mother scurrying into the house.

“There’s a tornado warning for our area,” Dad told them. “I just got a notification on my phone. Let’s go to the basement.”

Even in the basement, Josie and her family could hear the storm increasing in fury. The wind raged and howled, thunder roared, and lightning flashed again and again. Josie moved close to her dad, and he put a strong arm around her, hugging her close to his side.

At last the storm passed, and they all hurried upstairs, thankful the house was still intact. Josie went out to see if Henny-Penny and her chicks were all right. “They’re fine,” she reported a little later. She gave her father a hug. “I was really scared, Dad, but I felt safer with your arm around me. I guess I felt like the chicks, safe under their mother’s wings.”

“Henny-Penny sheltered her chicks, Dad sheltered you—and God shelters all His children,” said Mom.

“That’s right,” Dad said. “You’ll go through many kinds of storms in life, Josie. There will be times when things get tough and scary, and I may not always be there to put my arm around you. But just remember what the Bible says about your heavenly Father. Psalm 91 says, ‘He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.’”

“God has feathers and wings?” asked Josie.

Dad smiled. “God wants us to know that He’s always there to watch over us in life’s storms, so He gives an example He knows you and I can understand. We don’t have to be afraid when bad things happen because Jesus has saved us and given us eternal life. No matter what storms we face in life, God is with us.” ♥

MARY ROSE PEARSON




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### GOD WATCHES OVER YOU

**KEY VERSE:** HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS FEATHERS,  
AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU WILL FIND REFUGE. PSALM 91:4 (NIV)

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Are you afraid of something—thunderstorms, the dark, a new school, getting hurt? Like storms in nature, the storms of life can be scary, especially if you try to handle them alone. Remember that God understands your fears, and He’s right there with you. He promises to shelter you and take care of you. Trust Him to do that, no matter what situation you face.

## PLUGGING IN

READ: JOHN 1:5-9; 1 JOHN 1:5-7

**M**om, my aquarium light is broken.” Natalie tapped the top of her fish tank. “I guess my new guppy is going to be stuck in the dark.”

Mom set her coffee cup on the counter. “But that tank is brand new. It can’t be broken.”

“It just won’t turn on.” Natalie clicked the light switch attached to the aquarium cord.

“Let me see.” Mom checked under the aquarium. “It’s plugged into the wall.”

“Maybe the light bulb burned out.” Natalie shrugged.

Mom shook her head. “It’s an LED light. They’re supposed to last a long time. When was the last time it worked?”

“Last night.” Natalie clicked the cord switch again. “See. It doesn’t work.”

“Wait a minute.” Mom grinned. “The cord is plugged into the wall, but is it plugged into the aquarium?”

“Um...no!” Natalie found the plug had detached from the light. “It must have wiggled loose when I fed Shimmer his dinner.”

“Plug it in and try again,” said Mom.

The light clicked on, and Shimmer swished across the fish tank, expecting to be fed.

“That’s it!” Natalie laughed. “It wasn’t plugged in.”

“You know, people need to be plugged in too.”

“What do you mean, Mom?”

“A life without Jesus is a life spent in the dark. But when we turn to Him for forgiveness of our sins and trust Him as our Savior, it’s like a light turns on in our mind and heart. We finally know who God is, and we become connected to Him.”

“Just like clicking on a light switch?”

“That’s right, Natalie. But we need to be plugged in, or we’ll be stuck in the dark.”

“How?”

“When we trust in Jesus, He gives us the Holy Spirit, who lives in us as proof that we belong to God. He connects us to Jesus and shines His light in our lives.” Mom placed a hand on Natalie’s shoulder. “Would you like to trust in Jesus, Natalie? I can pray with you if you want.”

Natalie watched Shimmer glide by in his tank and nodded. “Sure, Mom. I don’t want to live in the dark.” ♥ CHANDA GRIESE

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### BE CONNECTED TO JESUS

**KEY VERSE:** [JESUS] SAID, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE. JOHN 8:12 (NIV)

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Have you trusted Jesus to forgive your sins and give you His light? If we aren’t connected to Jesus, we are living in darkness. When we trust Him as our Savior, the Holy Spirit brings to light who God is and connects us to Him. He helps us walk in the light of Jesus by guiding us in God’s truth and helping us show His love to others. Do you have the light of Jesus in your life? If not, trust in Him today.