

REBOOT

90 days of Recommitting, Rebuilding and Refreshing

Weekly Family Devotions

Week 1: God Is Unique

GOD'S FIRST COMMANDMENT SHOWS HIS UNIQUENESS.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 19:16-20; 20:1-3.

Verse of the Day: "Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

"Dad, what does this word mean?" Ching was studying for the regional finals of the fourth-grade spelling bee. He showed his father a flash card he had made, bearing the word unique.

Ching's dad removed his reading glasses and set down the newspaper he had been reading. "It means 'one of a kind,'" Dad said. "One of a kind," Ching echoed thoughtfully.

"Yes." Dad thought for a moment, then said, "For example, bats are unique." "Because they're blind?" Ching asked.

"Good guess, but bats really aren't blind. They have poor eyesight, but they can see," Dad said. "No, bats are unique because they are the only kind of mammal that can fly. They're unique among mammals."

"I get it," Ching said.

"Can you think of something else that's unique?" Dad asked. Ching smiled proudly and blurted, "God!"

Dad looked surprised, then smiled back at his son. "Well, yes, I suppose you're right. God is unique." He paused. "In fact," he said, "God is unique in a unique way." "What do you mean?"

"Well, a painting can be unique, but there are many paintings. Every snowflake is unique, but there are many snowflakes. Every human being is unique, but there are many other humans. Those things are all unique within their classes, within their own category."

"But there is only one God," Ching said.

"Yes, there is nothing—or no one else—in his class! He is his own category. There is no other God, no one who even comes close. That is why he tells us to worship no one but him. Because he is unique."

"Unique," Ching repeated. "U-N-I-Q-U-E! That's one word I don't think I'll forget how to spell, now that I know what it means."

TO DISCUSS: Take turns completing this statement: "God is unique because _____." What word would you use to describe God?

TO PRAY: "God, there is no one else like you. You alone are God."

Week 2: God Is Spirit

GOD'S SECOND COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE IS SPIRIT.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 20:4-6.

Verse of the Day: "God is spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

"Bobby, what does God look like?" Kristie asked her brother.

Bobby, who was nine years old—two years older than Kristie—answered confidently, "He looks like an old man, with a long, white beard."

Kristie peered at her brother through narrow eyes. She knew Bobby sometimes made things up when he didn't know what he was talking about.

Just then, Kristie saw Mr. Peerson walking his German shepherd. He came to the fence that stood between her backyard and the sidewalk.

"Mr. Peerson, what does God look like?" she asked.

"That's a good question, Kristie," Mr. Peerson said. He tilted his head and looked to the sky. "I think God looks like a lot of things. Like a tree, or a mountain, or even like Andrew Jackson here," he said, patting his dog's head.

Kristie waved good-bye to Mr. Peerson, then walked purposefully into the house. She found her mother sitting at the desk in the room they called the "study."

"Mom," Kristie said, peering over the large desk at her mother, who was typing on the computer. "What does God look like?" She told her mother what Bobby and Mr. Peerson had said about God.

Mom motioned for Kristie to come stand beside her chair. She clicked a few buttons on the computer. "I want to show you a verse in the Bible," she said. Kristie watched as the screen filled with verses from the Bible. Her mother pointed to one of the verses. "The Bible says that God is Spirit. Do you know what that means?"

Kristie tried to think of the right answer, but finally shook her head.

"It means that God doesn't have a body. That's why in the Ten Commandments, God said we shouldn't make any images to worship, thinking that those things look like God, because God is spirit. We can't make anything that looks like him, because we can't make anything that can be everywhere at once, invisible, all around us, and even in us."

Kristie smiled broadly.

"Why are you smiling?" Mom asked.

"I knew God didn't look like Andrew Jackson," Kristie said.

Kristie's mom watched with a confused look as her daughter left the room. "Andrew Jackson?" she whispered.

TO DISCUSS: What does the phrase "God is Spirit" mean to you? How can this truth help us when we think God isn't near?

TO PRAY: "Lord, we're thankful that you can be everywhere through your Spirit."

Week 3: God Is Holy

GOD'S THIRD COMMANDMENT REVEALS HIS HOLINESS.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 20:7.

Verse of the Day: "Do not use my name to swear a falsehood and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:12).

On the first day of a mountain hiking trip with Danny Franklin and Danny's father, Will suddenly lost his footing and slid several feet down the hillside. He finally checked his slide by gripping a sapling in one hand while he searched for a foothold.

When Mr. Franklin saw Will lose his footing, he immediately dropped his backpack and unwrapped a length of clothesline.

"Will! Grab the rope! I'll pull you up!" Mr. Franklin called. He flung the line to Will.

A few moments later, Will stood safely beside Danny and Mr. Franklin. He whistled and said God's name, followed by a curse word. "That was close," he said.

Mr. Franklin draped his right arm around Will's shoulders. "It sure was, Will. But will you do something for me?"

"Sure, Mr. Franklin," Will said. "What?"

"I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't use God's name like that. Saying God's name with a curse word isn't right." "Why not?" Will asked.

"Because God said we're not to take his name in vain," Danny interrupted. "What does that mean?" Will asked.

"It means several things," Mr. Franklin explained. "In the Ten Commandments, God forbids making a false pledge or vow using his name. But it also applies to any frivolous or profane use of his name. In fact, in Jesus' day, the Jews considered the name of God so holy that they wouldn't say it, or even spell it. Instead, they would substitute other names for it, like 'the Lord,' or 'the Holy One.'"

"But why?" Will asked.

"Because God is holy. He's so holy that even his name is to be respected." "I never realized that," Will said.

Mr. Franklin stretched his arms around both boys. "You see, men, God's commandments not only tell us what we should or shouldn't do. They also show us what God is like, because his commands are rooted in his character."

"Oh," said Will. "Sort of like that little tree I was holding on to was rooted in the hillside."

"Yeah," Mr. Franklin answered with a smile. "Now if you can hold on to God's commandments like you held on to that tree, you'll do all right."

TO DISCUSS: What are some ways that people misuse God's name? How can a person honor God's name?

TO PRAY: "God, we want to honor your name and never use it thoughtlessly or frivolously. We want to do that by praising your name and by blessing others."

Week 4: God Is Gracious

GOD'S FOURTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS HIS GRACE.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 20:8-10.

Verse of the Day: "The Sabbath was made to benefit people" (Mark 2:27).

"Do you know what tomorrow is?" Mom asked Luke and Hannah. "God's Day!" the children shouted in unison.

"What's 'God's Day'?" asked Jenny, the woman who lived next door. She had dropped by to return a pair of hedge clippers that Mom had loaned to her, and Mom had invited her in for a cup of tea.

Mom smiled at her neighbor. "That's what the children call Sunday," she explained. Jenny didn't attend church, although Mom had invited her several times.

"They like going to church?" Jenny asked, a tone of surprise in her voice.

"Oh, yes," Mom answered. "They love Sunday church as much as Ben and I do," Mom said, referring to her husband. "But God's Day is more than that."

"More?" Jenny said, sipping her tea.

"God's Day is special to them because it means going to Sunday school and church. It's also special because it means their daddy doesn't go to work. He gets to spend all day with us, and it's always a very special day. Sometimes we go hiking. Sometimes we play games together. Sometimes we sit and read stories together."

"It sounds really nice," Jenny said dreamily.

"Oh, it is, Jenny," Mom answered. "You see, God commanded his people to observe the Sabbath for their own good. It shows how loving and gracious he is." Mom picked up the teapot and refilled Jenny's cup. "He didn't have to finish the work of creating the heavens and the earth in six days. He didn't rest because he was tired. He rested on the seventh day in order to establish a Sabbath for us humans. He set aside one day for us to worship him and to be refreshed and restored. The Sabbath doesn't have to be a particular day, but is the concept of rest that we should keep. We've chosen Sunday!"

"Makes sense," Jenny said. "My husband hasn't taken a day off in months. I think it's really starting to take its toll on him."

Mom nodded sympathetically. "The Sabbath also reminds us that the world will go on without us, and that we don't have to do it all."

A long moment of silence passed between the two women. Finally, Jenny broke the silence. "Thank you," she said. She took a final sip of tea. "I must get some of this for myself," she said.

"Here," Mom said, standing, "let me give you a few tea bags. It's just herbal tea." "I wasn't talking about the tea," Jenny answered.

TO DO: This week do something special that will honor the Lord's Day and make it different from every other day this week. You might unplug the television, sing worship songs, look at family photo albums, or play board games together.

TO PRAY: "Lord, your special day is our special day too. Thank you for being a gracious God."

Week 5: God Is Respectful

GOD'S FIFTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE VALUES RESPECT.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 20:12.

Verse of the Day: "Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do" (Ephesians 6:1).

"But your parents are never going to know!" Darren pleaded with his friend Mark. They stood together at the edge of the school parking lot. "It won't hurt anything just to drive me and Angie to the water park. Then you can take your little brother home."

Sean, Mark's eight-year-old brother, spoke up before Mark did. "I'm not little!" he retorted. "Besides, Dad won't let Mark drive that far!"

Mark shot him a silencing look, then turned back to Darren. "They let me use the car to go to school. If I want to go anywhere else, I need to check with them."

"But they're going to say no, you know they will," Darren complained. He knew that Mark's parents would never give him permission to drive the thirty miles to the water park on a school night.

Mark shrugged. "So there's no point in even asking them," he said. "That's what I want to hear," Darren said triumphantly. "You just drop off Angie and me, and you'll be home before your parents are."

"You're not getting it, Darren," Mark said. "I'm not taking you." "Why not?" Darren asked, whining like a two-year-old. "There's nothing wrong with helping out a friend."

Mark sighed. "Yeah, there is, if my friend wants me to disobey my parents." He paused. "See, Darren, the Bible says to honor your father and mother. Doing something that I know they would not approve of would not be honoring them."

Anger flashed in Darren's eyes. "Oh, come on, Mark. You can't base everything you do on the Bible."

"I can try," Mark answered. "But it's not just the Bible I'm basing it on; it's God himself. See, God's commands are a reflection of what he's like." "You're telling me God honors his parents?" Darren squealed. Mark shook his head. "No, God doesn't have parents. But he respects us enough to give us the choice to do right or do wrong. He respects us enough to entrust us with his Word. And it's that part of his nature we reflect when we respect our parents."

Darren stared at his friend in silence for a moment. Finally, Darren spoke. "I guess that means you're not taking me and Angie to the water park."

"You don't have to guess," Mark answered, winking at his younger brother. "Guess you told him!" Sean said with a grin.

TO DISCUSS: Why should parents be honored? How have you honored your parents in the last few days? Name some practical ways to continue honoring them.

TO PRAY: "God, teach us to honor our parents and those who are like parents to us."

Week 6: God Is the Author of Life

GOD'S SIXTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS HIM AS THE CREATOR OF LIFE.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Genesis 4:1-10.

Verse of the Day: "Do not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

"Daddy! Daddy!" Krystal burst into her dad's workshop in the garage. "Have you seen Snowball?"

Dad lifted the goggles he wore to protect his eyes and looked at Krystal. Her expression was frantic. He set the goggles down on the table saw and shut it off. "She's right here, Krystal," he said, pointing to the cat curled up on the threadbare sofa behind him.

{Crystal's eyes opened wider. She dashed to the couch and scooped the furry white creature into her arms.

"What's wrong?" Dad asked.

Krystal stroked the animal's soft fur. "Shane told me that Mr. Greems is putting out poison because he doesn't like people's cats coming into his yard. I just had to find Snowball and make sure she was OK."

Dad smiled and sat on the couch next to Krystal. He draped an arm around his daughter. "You really love Snowball, don't you?" he said. Krystal nodded. "You'd hate to see anything happen to her, wouldn't you?" Again Krystal nodded.

They sat in silence for a few moments. Finally, Dad took a deep breath. "You know, Krystal," he said, "the way you feel about Snowball, and how you'd be so upset if anything happened to her, well, that's only a fraction of the way God feels about all his creatures—people especially."

The cat purred in Krystal's lap as she listened to her father.

"It may be hard to imagine, but, as much as you love Snowball, our lives are even more precious to God—every one of us. And as much as you want to protect Snowball and preserve her life, God wants to protect and preserve all the people he's created. That's why he says we should never kill another human being—because that person's life is precious to God."

"Maybe we should have named her Precious instead of Snowball," Krystal suggested.

Dad smiled. "She's precious no matter what we call her," he said.

TO DISCUSS: Why does God say, "Do not murder"? How does that commandment reveal God's nature? Why is it important to understand that God values human life?

TO PRAY: "God, help us to respect life just as you respect it."

Week 7: God Is Pure and Faithful

GOD'S SEVENTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE IS PURE AND FAITHFUL.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Hebrews 13:4.

Verse of the Day: "Do not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

The church was decorated with white candles and ribbons. People continued to file into the sanctuary. Terry and his family had been seated a few minutes earlier and were waiting for the wedding to start.

Terry saw his mom and dad trade wedding rings. He leaned across his sister, Anna, and tapped his mom on the arm. "Why did you do that?" he asked, pointing to the ring she held in her hand.

Mom smiled. "I'll tell you after the wedding," she whispered.

Once the crowd was seated and the ceremony started, Terry turned back to ask his mom to tell him why she had exchanged rings with his dad, but she simply smiled and shook her head when he started to speak.

Finally, when the ceremony was over, Terry squeezed by his sister before his parents could stand up. "Why did you and Dad trade rings?" he asked. He looked at his mom's hand and noticed that she wore her own ring again.

"Your father and I do that every time we attend a wedding," she said.

Dad leaned closer to his son. "I gave that ring to your mother on our wedding day, a long time ago," he said, pointing to the sparkling ring on Mom's finger. "And she gave me this ring," he said, twirling the gold band on his finger. "These rings are symbols of the vows we exchanged that day."

Terry wrinkled his nose to reflect his confusion.

Dad interlaced his fingers with Mom's and held their hands up so Terry could see both rings. "We wear these rings," Dad said, "to remind each other of our promise to love each other and to be pure and faithful to each other for the rest of our lives."

"And every time we attend a wedding," Mom said, "we repeat those promises all over again. That's why we traded rings at the beginning of the ceremony, so we could promise all over again to be faithful to each other."

"Because, you see, Son," Dad continued, "when we're pure and faithful to each other, we please God, because that's what God is like. He is pure and faithful himself. Our marriage is beautiful because it reflects the character of God." "Oh," Terry said. "Can I ask you another question?" Mom and Dad nodded together.

"Can we go eat now?" he said, thinking of the wedding cake. "I'm hungry." Mom and Dad laughed, as they walked out of the sanctuary together.

TO DO: Make a card for a couple you know who have been married for a long time. Let them know how much their faithfulness to each other has meant to you over the years.

TO PRAY: "Lord, we praise you for your purity and for your faithfulness. Help us to reflect your character."

Week 8: God Is Trustworthy

GOD'S EIGHTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE IS TRUSTWORTHY.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Ephesians 4:22-28.

Verse of the Day: "Do not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

"Cathy, look what I've got!" Gina called.

Gina dug into her jacket pocket. As she did so, Cathy noticed that her friend carefully looked around the school bus, as if making sure no one was watching her. Gina pulled out a pair of sunglasses.

"Those are cool!" Cathy said, excited for her friend. "I wish I had a pair like that."

"Yeah," Gina cooed, as she turned them over in her hands.

"Can I wear them?" Cathy asked.

"Just wait," Gina whispered. "I have to wait until Stacy gets off the bus."

"Why do you have to wait until Stacy . . . ?" Cathy's voice trailed off as she suddenly realized the answer to her own question. "You stole those from Stacy!"

Gina shot her friend a vicious look. "Keep it down," she hissed. "I didn't steal anything."

"Yes, you did," Cathy insisted. "Those sunglasses don't belong to you." "They do now."

"Gina, don't do it." Cathy's tone turned pleading. "You know it's wrong."

"No, it's not." Gina looked for understanding in her friend's eyes but saw only disappointment. "Look, Stacy can have anything she wants. She's got the best clothes, the best shoes, the best everything. She won't even miss these stupid sunglasses."

"That doesn't make it right, Gina. Stealing is wrong."

"Says who?"

"Says God. 'Do not steal,' remember?"

"Give me a break!" Gina said. "This is Stacy we're talking about!"

"No, Gina, it's you we're talking about. And the same thing that makes it wrong to steal from you makes it wrong to steal from Stacy—because it's not the way God is. It's not the way God wants us to be."

Gina rolled her eyes, but Cathy continued. "God tells us not to steal because he's totally honest and trustworthy, and he wants us to be like him. You may think you're cool if you wear those sunglasses, but God thinks it'd be cool to give them back." She paused. "And I do too."

Gina stared at Cathy for a few moments. Finally, she reached into her pocket. "I guess you know what you can get me for my birthday, don't you?" she said.

TO DO: Good Housekeeping magazine has what is known as the "Good Housekeeping Seal" for products. By this seal, people know that a product is trustworthy. Have each family member make his or her own trustworthy "seal." What symbol will you use? What phrase will you say to let others know that you are trustworthy?

TO PRAY: "Lord, we want to be honest just as you are honest."

Week 9: God Is True

GOD'S NINTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE IS TRUE.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Proverbs 12:17-22.

Verse of the Day: "Do not testify falsely against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

All heads in Hannah's classroom turned and watched as a student entered the room and handed Mrs. Busby a piece of paper. The teacher read the note, then stood.

"I want you all to work quietly at your desks for a few minutes," Hannah's teacher announced. "I'll only be gone for a minute or two."

As soon as the teacher left, Hannah's friend Amy dashed to the classroom window. "Hannah!" she whispered, furiously waving a hand. "Come here."

Hannah tried to ignore her, but Amy wouldn't be quiet. Finally, Hannah got up from her seat and stood beside Amy at the window.

"Look," Amy said. "There's Bobby Myers. He said he thinks you're pretty cool."

"Is that all you wanted? To show me Bobby Myers?" Hannah turned from the window and returned to her seat just as Mrs. Busby entered the room.

Amy still stood at the window. She tried to dash into her seat, but she was too late. Mrs. Busby had seen her.

"Amy," Mrs. Busby said, "I'll expect to see you after school." The teacher turned to face the rest of the class. "Did anyone else leave his or her seat?"

The room fell silent, and after a few moments, Hannah's hand crept into the air.

"Anyone else?" Mrs. Busby scanned the room, but no other hands were raised. "Then I'll expect to see you after school, too," she said, nodding toward Hannah.

After class, Amy and Hannah walked to their next class together.

"Sorry I got you in trouble," Amy said.

Hannah shrugged. "It was my fault, too."

"You shouldn't have said anything," Amy said.

"That would have been lying, though," Hannah answered.

"Just to keep your mouth shut?"

Hannah nodded. "I've been learning that the reason lying is wrong is because it's not like God. He tells us not to tell lies because he always tells the truth."

"So that's why you told the truth today?" Amy asked. "Even though it got you in trouble?"

"I didn't like getting in trouble with Mrs. Busby," Hannah answered. "But I did like doing the right thing."

Amy studied her friend's face. "What do you know," she said. "Bobby Myers is right for once." She smiled. "You are pretty cool."

TO DISCUSS: How does the ninth commandment reveal God's nature? Are there other ways a person can lie?

TO PRAY: "Lord, protect us from any sinful desires to lie."

Week 10: God Is Enough

GOD'S TENTH COMMANDMENT SHOWS THAT HE VALUES CONTENTMENT.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Exodus 20:17.

Verse of the Day: "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6,NIV).

Randy and his dad listened to the special news bulletin that had come over the radio. The newscaster reported the arrest of three teenagers who had beaten a classmate to death with a baseball bat after the classmate refused to give up a jacket. When the report ended, Dad turned the volume down.

"What do you think about what those three teenagers did?" Dad asked.

Randy shrugged. His dad asked him that kind of question all the time. "It was wrong," he answered.

"Why was it wrong?"

"Well," Randy said, as if the answer were obvious, "because killing is wrong." Then Randy added, "And killing is wrong because God said 'Do not kill.' And God said 'Do not kill' because he values life."

Dad smiled broadly. "Wow!" he said. "I'm impressed. Now I have another question," Dad said. "Those three teenagers did something wrong before they even started to beat up that boy, before they took his jacket. In fact, their first sin led to all the others. Do you know what that was?"

Randy fell silent for a few moments, but finally he shook his head at his father.

"What's the last of the Ten Commandments?" Dad asked.

Randy thought for a moment, then answered, "'Do not covet.'"

Dad nodded, but said nothing. Suddenly, Randy's eyes grew wide.

"I know!" he said. "The thing that started it all was when those guys coveted the other guy's jacket!"

"Exactly," Dad said. "Their first sin was coveting. . . ."

"God said 'Do not covet.'"

"But why did God say that?" Dad asked, pressing further. Randy thought for a minute. Finally he shook his head. "I don't know." "God said not to covet because he wants us to be content," Dad said. "The Bible says, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' God values contentment because he is never discontent. He has everything he needs-because he is everything he needs. And he wants us to be content with him and with all he gives us." Dad paused. "Before I turn the volume up on the radio, why don't we pray for God to help us both become less covetous and more like him?"

Randy smiled and nodded thoughtfully.

TO DISCUSS: What does it mean to covet? Why do people covet? Why do you think God doesn't want people to covet? Can you trust God and still covet? Why or why not?

TO PRAY: "Lord, protect us from wanting what others have. May we be content with what you have given us."

Week 11: One Commandment

IF YOU LOVE OTHERS ALL THE TIME, YOU'LL DO WHAT'S RIGHT ALL THE TIME.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Romans 13:8-10.

Verse of the Day: "When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"I don't see how you can remember all those commandments," Cassandra told her best friend, Josie.

The two girls were doing their homework together in the school library.

"What do you mean?" Josie asked. She and Cassandra had had many conversations about God and Jesus. Josie was a Christian, but her friend Cassandra had just started going to church with her.

"You know," Cassandra said. "All those 'Don't do this' and 'Don't do that.' How do you keep 'em straight?"

"I don't know," Josie answered. "It's not like that. . . ." Her voice trailed off, and her gaze searched around the library table. Finally, her eyes fastened on her math book. "It's like this," she said. "How much is one plus one?"

Cassandra's eyes narrowed as if she were expecting a trick. "Two," she said.

"How much is two plus two?"

Cassandra's expression became more confused. "Four," she said, "but I don't see—" "How much is three plus three?" "Six," she answered. "Why?"

"How do you remember all that?" Josie asked, a twinkle in her eye. "I just know it. But that's different," Cassandra protested. "That's just arithmetic." "You're right," Josie said, "it is different. But not the way you think. God's commandments are even easier to understand than addition and subtraction, because you really only have to remember one thing."

Josie reached for her paperback Bible. She thumbed through the pages, then stopped. "Here. It says, 'If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law.'" She pointed to the page. "See?"

Cassandra read the words, her lips moving slowly and silently as she read. "What's that mean?" she asked.

"It means, the one commandment to remember is to love others. If you do that all the time, you'll do what's right all the time."

Cassandra shrugged. "I can remember that," she said.

TO DISCUSS: What kind of world would this be if everyone loved one another? Is it possible to do right all the time?

TO PRAY: "Loving Father, thank you for loving us. Help us to love others through your Holy Spirit living in us."

Week 12: Lessons In Self-Control

EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL TO BE WORTHY OF RESPECT AND TO LIVE WISELY.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Titus 2:1-6.

Verse of the Day: "A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls" (Proverbs 25:28).

"Mom, Dad, do I have to take piano lessons?" Curt asked. It was time for his weekly piano lesson, and he would have preferred to do almost anything else.

"Well, Curt," Mom said, "why don't you want to take piano lessons?"

"Because," Curt answered, "piano lessons are boring."

Dad joined the conversation. "They're not as boring as they used to be, are they?" "Well, no," Curt said, "but they're still boring." "But you like playing the piano," Mom countered. "I like playing the piano, but I don't like taking lessons." "But taking lessons is how you got to the point where you are now, where you can sit down and play almost anything you want," Mom said. Curt sighed. "I know," he admitted.

"In fact," Dad said, "piano lessons are a good example of the way self-control and self-discipline can benefit us. You probably don't remember your first lessons, but we do." He exchanged smiles with his wife. "You had to play the same three notes over and over again."

"But now you can sit down and play some of the songs you hear on the radio and songs we sing in church," Mom added. "And you like being able to do that, don't you?" "Yeah, but-" Curt started.

"The enjoyment you get out of playing the piano now is a direct result of the lessons you've taken. If you had chosen immediate gratification when you first started lessons, you'd be able to play 'Chopsticks' now, but that's about it. But you delayed some things you wanted to do-like watching TV or playing outside-and chose to practice instead. As a result, you get pleasure out of playing now."

"OK, OK, I get the message," Curt said. He acted annoyed, but he had to stifle a smile.

"Do you?" Dad said. "What's the message?"

Curt rolled his eyes as he answered, in a singsong voice, "Piano lessons are good for me."

"Not just piano lessons," Mom answered, "but any time you exercise self-control and self-discipline, you're adding to your abilities and accomplishments."

"OK," Curt said. "I think I'm going to go play the piano for a while now, OK?" "Really?" Mom said in an excited voice. "Dad and I must really be convincing, eh?" "No," Curt answered teasingly. "I just want to get some peace and quiet!"

TO DISCUSS: What are the areas in which you find self-discipline hardest to maintain? How can exercising self-control add to your abilities and accomplishments?

TO PRAY: Take turns praying, "God, please help me to develop more self-control, especially in the areas of my life where I am weakest."

Week 13: That's Not Fair!

ACTING JUSTLY PROTECTS US FROM GUILT AND PROVIDES US WITH CLEAR CONSCIENCES.

Bible Reading of the Day: Read Proverbs 2:6-11.

Verse of the Day: "[God] grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity" (Proverbs 2:7).

"It's your turn to do the dishes!" Joel protested to his older sister.

"Look," Kathy said, "Evan's going to be here any minute to pick me up for our date. I don't have time to do them."

"Well, I'm not going to do them!"

"Yes, you are! When Mom and Dad are gone, I'm in charge. If you don't do them, they'll be mad at you, not me."

"But that's not fair!" Joel's angry tone had turned to a whine. The doorbell rang.

"I don't have time to argue," Kathy said over her shoulder as she walked toward the front door. "Just do the dishes!"

Kathy cast one last look into the kitchen as she closed the door behind her. She saw her brother standing beside the sink, an angry look on his face.

He makes such a big deal out of everything, she told herself as she got into Evan's car. It's not like he can't do the dishes to help me out just this once. I've done lots of things for him.

Kathy and Evan didn't talk much on the drive to the movie theater. Her mind was still on her little brother's frustrated form in front of the kitchen sink, which was piled high with dishes. He's right, it's not fair, she thought. I should have done the dishes instead of talking to Brittany on the phone after dinner. She began to feel guilty, but shrugged it off. I'll apologize to him later.

She said nothing to Evan as they got in line to buy tickets at the theater. She still couldn't shake her feelings of guilt over the way she'd treated Joel. Finally, she couldn't stand it anymore.

"Wait," she said just as they arrived at the ticket counter. "I need to go home." She quickly explained the situation to him and was relieved that he seemed to understand.

As soon as she arrived home, Kathy announced to a shocked Joel that she was going to do the dishes. "And," Kathy added, "I'll do the dishes tomorrow night, too."

"Wow!" Joel said. "How about doing my homework, too?"

"Don't push your luck," Kathy said, as she pointed the sink sprayer in her brother's direction.

TO DISCUSS: Have you ever felt guilty for treating someone unjustly? How can treating others fairly "fill you with joy"? How can acting justly give you a clear conscience?

TO PRAY: "Help us, Lord, to value others by our just actions."

Devotions adapted and compiled from Josh McDowell's "Family Devotional Archive".
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