

“I have known Pastor Don Meinberg for over seven years, since the time he planted Reflections Christian Fellowship in Southern California. During that time, I have seen his energy and enthusiasm, not only for God but also for kids. I have read his *Reaching New Heights* series and believe that these are great books for young people going through the tough preteen and teen years. The daily topics are what middle school and young high school kids may experience for the first time, and his format will definitely help kids learn how to use the Bible to deal with problems. These books are needed, especially in today’s world.”

—**Jeff Ludington,**

Lead Pastor of Generations Church

Author of *Frustrated: How the Bible Resolves Life’s Tough Questions*

“I have known Pastor Don for over 25 years. He has a true love for Jesus and especially for kids. He has worked many years with middle school and high school kids in building them up in the Lord. His book series *Reaching New Heights* is a must-read for any young person going through the difficult years of puberty and beyond. It is a unique book series that gives kids God-centered advice on some difficult topics that they might be experiencing for the first time. Every middle school and young high school student needs this book series to help them answer the tough questions of life in a Christ-centered way. It will bless kids and parents alike!”

—**Mark Bridgeford,**

Elder, Summit Ridge Church, Rancho Cucamonga, California

“*Reaching New Heights* would be a valuable resource for any pastor, youth worker, or parent’s library. As adolescent young brains are developing, they need time to think through the issues of their lives and experience God speaking directly to them in His word. These amazing books provide such a great resource and would bless the lives and homes of Christians with

clarity and substance. Best of all, I can see this series being the catalyst for opening lines of communication and dialogue within families and churches. It is highly recommended.”

—**Tommy Peterson**,
Youth Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church

“As a fifteen-year-old girl, I find that these books fit right in with the things that happen in school and church all the time. It helps to read what the Bible tells us to do in all these situations and to see the solutions to these difficult issues of life. *Reaching New Heights* contains a wide range of topics and hits the specific audience where things are very relative. It provides Scripture for different learning types and is well-laid-out for each question and answer.”

—**Tori Hitchcock**,
Escondido, California

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

GOD'S ANSWERS TO YOUNG TEENS' QUESTIONS

VOLUME 3: JULY–SEPTEMBER

DON MEINBERG

LUCIDBOOKS

Reaching New Heights

God's Answers to Young Teens' Questions

Volume 3: July–September

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
July 1	Helping kids with crises	4
July 2	Living in the past	6
July 3	Dealing with kids getting embarrassed	8
July 4	Dealing with wicked actions	10
July 5	God's will	12
July 6	Hate	14
July 7	Ignorance	16
July 8	Dealing with kids who judge others	18
July 9	Lack of patience	20
July 10	Helping kids who worship material things	22
July 11	Making mistakes	24
July 12	Dealing with unhappy people	26
July 13	New school	28
July 14	Rejection	30
July 15	Dealing with vengeful kids	32
July 16	Helping kids who lack self-control	34
July 17	Selfishness among family	36
July 18	Dealing with a shy, abused friend	38
July 19	Sin	40
July 20	Dealing with thieves	42
July 21	Helping kids with strict parents	44
July 22	Guiding a friend with teacher problems	46
July 23	Unreliable	48

July 24	Helping a friend witness	50
July 25	Snobby friends	52
July 26	Tough choices	54
July 27	Conceited kids	56
July 28	Making tough decisions	58
July 29	Friends hiding nasty problems	60
July 30	Hell	62
July 31	Peer pressure	64
July Journal		66

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to give kids in middle school to high school between the ages of 10 and 15 a place to find God's answers for problems they face daily. There are numerous books and other publications that focus only on high school or college age kids and the struggles and problems they face regarding drugs and alcohol, dating, sex, jobs, and career choices. But my research found very few books that concentrate solely on questions that young teens or preteens face in their everyday lives. Their issues may be similar to the topics facing high school and college age kids but from a totally different perspective. Younger kids may be facing some of these issues for the very first time and are confused and frustrated. Also, their questions are more likely to be about lying to elders, cheating on tests, new friendships, temptations, and difficult choices. This book gives them an avenue to learn what God says about these issues and how to apply God's answers to their lives in a language they can understand.

The book is formatted with an advice-column look with the main topic at the top of the page and the related issue or question directly below. The issues or questions are mainly presented as stories that young teens might be experiencing. But the beauty of this book is that young teens or preteens can revise the story content to fit a similar problem or issue they are encountering that is related to the main topic. They can do that for any of the main topics in the book.

Following each question or issue is a section called "What God Says." It includes the book, chapter, and verse in the Bible that directly relates to the question and main topic. Sometimes, a paraphrase of the verse is used.

It may or may not include the entire verse, depending on the issue. I paraphrase some verses to make it easier for the reader to understand and apply the appropriate meaning of the verse to the subject or question. The Bible translation used in this book is the New Living Translation, chosen for its accuracy and easy-to-read format.

Below the Bible's solution to the issue is the application of God's answer. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult to interpret what the Bible means and apply it to the problem at hand. This section does that for the reader, breaking down God's words into practical terms that a young teen can understand and use to solve their own dilemma. Each answer is unique to the question presented and God's solution to that issue.

Once the young teen has read the issue, learned God's solution, and understood its meaning by applying the verse, they are ready for the next section called "Questions to Ponder." Here, we want our young students to write down their thoughts and notes on what they just read. Each topic includes a couple of questions to guide them along in their thinking. This section is a tool that can be used for open discussion among a group of young teens, or it can be used as a tool for individuals to write down their own thoughts and ideas and how they apply to their own situation.

At the top of each journal page is a motto that directly relates to the main topic. The purpose of the motto is to give the reader one final thought on the main topic and hopefully inspire them to remember this topic and solution for a long time. The young teen may not remember the story or the Bible verse, but chances are good that they will remember the motto because it is only one line directed exclusively at the main topic.

There are very few (if any) books available for young teens and preteens ages 10 to 15 that relate directly to them and their needs from a biblical perspective. It takes those difficult issues—prayers not answered, lack of communication with parents—for young teens to understand and apply God's word. This is a book for their level of maturity written primarily for their age group, focusing totally on questions and problems in their lives with useful God-inspired answers. This book will teach young teens right from wrong with a biblical stance on tough issues that would make even adults

cringe. This book could become a source of enlightenment for students and an answered prayer for the adults in their lives.

This book can be used in a variety of ways: as a daily devotional for a year, as an advice textbook, as a diary of solutions to teens' problems, or as a memorable book of stories with God's solutions.

JULY 1

HELPING KIDS WITH CRISES

Q: My friend's older brother is 17 years old. He got involved with the wrong crowd and ran away from home last year. He stayed with his friend. The problem is that this friend is heavy into drugs and is extremely violent. Now, my friend's brother is addicted to drugs and is starting to become violent. A month ago, he broke into a house looking for money. He ended up stealing about \$50, but he broke a window and cracked a lock. Last week, we caught him in my mom's room stealing her jewelry. When she confronted him, he said that if we call the police, he will come back and kill my mom and me. I know that was the drugs talking, but my mom is pretty scared. I don't know how to help my friend in this crisis.

What God Says: Psalm 57:1 *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the violent storm has passed.**

A: Your friend's brother needs help right away before it's too late. If he continues on this course, he will either end up in prison or dead. The only real protection your friend and your mom need right now comes from God. They need to pray to Him for strength and guidance to do the right thing. And the right thing to protect them from any harm would be to turn your friend's brother in to the police. They need to get him off the streets because he will definitely get in more trouble and possibly hurt more people the longer he is on the streets. Then, continue to pray for his heart to change and to get his life cleaned up.

Questions to ponder:

How do you help a friend in a crisis?

What would you say or do if the crisis was similar to the one described above?

JULY 2

LIVING IN THE PAST

Q: I love to daydream. But unfortunately, I don't dream about future goals or hopes. I dream about past failures and analyze what I did wrong and how to improve myself. See, I'm a perfectionist and when I fail at something (bad grade, losing a game, etc.), I can't seem to get it out of my mind. That really hurts me for future events because I'm not focusing on the present. Instead, I'll go over and over why something happened until I figure out a solution. I need to stop thinking about the past and concentrate on the present, but I don't know how to get it out of my mind.

What God Says: *Philippians 3:13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not at all where I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.**

A: There is an old saying that holds true even today: You can't change the past. You need to learn from past mistakes but not dwell on them. God teaches us in the above verse to look ahead to what's coming because there is nothing you can do to change the past. Ask God to help you get focused on what's in the present that will guide your future. Don't fret over mistakes of the past. Only Jesus Christ was perfect when He lived on this earth, and we cannot live by that lofty goal. Think about the present and dream about the future, and have God as the focal point of your life.

Questions to ponder:

Do you like to daydream?

If yes, what do you dream about?

If no, what are your dreams for your future?

JULY 3

DEALING WITH KIDS GETTING EMBARRASSED

Q: My friends like to do little pranks just for fun. It started with innocent stuff such as prank phone calls or ringing a doorbell and running, which is cool to them. But now, they are practicing more dangerous pranks that are against the law. Like one of the kids painted graffiti on a public wall one night. It was a picture of an undressed woman. The next week, they wanted to go to a kid's house and throw rocks at his window. My friend said that enough was enough, and he didn't want to participate. They teased him unmercifully, calling him names and being cruel to him. They publicly humiliated him in front of the whole school by getting on the PA system and telling a personal secret of his that was very embarrassing. They did this all because he wouldn't break the law by doing these harmful pranks. Needless to say, my friend was so embarrassed that he didn't come to school for three days.

What God Says: Mark 8:38 *If a person is ashamed of Me and my message in the adulterous and sinful days, I, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when I return.**

A: Instead of being embarrassed, your friend should be proud of himself for standing up for what is right. I know it had to be embarrassing for him to be publicly humiliated, but God smiles on those who have the courage to walk away from evil. As a friend, you need to encourage him and praise him for his decision to move away from that group of kids. Tell him to walk tall and not worry about the teasing, because in time, it will pass. But the courage and character he gained from doing the right thing will stay with him forever.

Question to ponder:

How do you help kids who get embarrassed?

JULY 4

DEALING WITH WICKED ACTIONS

Q: There is a kid in my class who I don't like. It's not like he's ever done anything to me personally. I just don't like him. He comes off real cocky and arrogant, but other kids seem to like him. He's got a loud voice that absolutely irritates me. He just has this personality that bugs me. He's nice to all the girls, so they all like him. He seems real nice to everyone except me. He basically ignores me and says nothing to me. There is just something about him that I hate. So after school tomorrow, when no one is around, I'm going to take the tires off his bike and bend his handlebars. Boy, this kid really bugs me!

What God Says: Romans 12:21 *Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.**

A: The verse above is the best advice I can give you. Just don't let the evil get the best of you. Why can't you just ignore this kid? Why do you need to do something wicked? Remember, wicked thoughts and wicked actions come from the devil. The devil is telling you to do these bad deeds to this kid's bike. You need to take a step back and analyze what you are doing. He hasn't done anything to you. Why would you want to punish him? You need to pray to God to help you get rid of these evil thoughts. Always try to do what is right. In the long run, you will feel better about yourself.

Questions to ponder:

How do you handle your desire to do wicked things?

How would you try to help kids who do wicked things if they were your friends?

Q: How do I really know that God is watching over me? How do I really know what God wants me to do with my life? My parents and Sunday school teacher tell me to pray to Him and listen for His answers. But I don't hear anything. I pray to God, but nothing happens. There was a time when I wanted to go into the ministry, but I have more questions than answers. Sometimes, I think I want to be a rock and roll singer, but I feel that God has another plan for me. So right now, I just don't know. I wish God would tell me what He wants for my life.

What God Says: James 1:5 *If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him and He will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.**

A: God already knows what direction your life will be heading. In order to do God's will, you need to know what that is. And the way to find out is to read the Bible, pray to Him consistently, and listen to His response in your heart. God wants us to put Him first in our lives, no matter what we do. God wants us to do what is right and just. God wants us to obey His laws of the land. God wants us to accept Jesus into our lives. God wants us to love people. So it doesn't matter whether you want to be a minister or a rock and roll star. Just do it in a way that honors God. That is God's will.

Questions to ponder:

Why is doing God's will so important?

How important is it to you to do God's will? Why?

Q: I hate my father for the way he treats my mom. He treats my older brother and me just fine, but he is very abusive to my mom. He yells at her all the time for the dumbest reasons, like his dinner is cold or the TV remote is lost (like it's her fault), or his shirts aren't ironed. He yells very loudly and sometimes cusses at her. When he's really angry with her, he hits her across the face, which makes my mom cry and leave the house. When my father gets in these moods, I hate how he talks to my mom and how he mistreats her. I don't know how to get rid of these hateful feelings.

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 *Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable and keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices when the truth comes out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**

A: You can hate the way your father treats your mom, but it is wrong to hate your father. Hating the action or circumstance is understandable; hating the individual is wrong. God is all about love, not hate. What you need to do is either get your father some counseling (anger management) or get him away from the house so no more harm can be done. But you do this out of love for him, not because you hate him. Remember, love will never give up or lose faith through any circumstance.

Questions to ponder:

Name a person you dislike a lot.

How could you change those feelings of hate in your heart?

Q: I was born late in my parents' lives—when they were in their mid-40s. I'm 13 now, and they are almost 60 years old. So, they are pretty conservative and extremely old-fashioned in the way they think and discipline. The clothes they buy for me were popular 20 years ago. They don't allow cable or violent video games because they are evil in their opinion. And they are strict on the music I listen to and the TV I watch. A lot of times when they say no, I just ignore them and do it anyway. I don't care what they think, because they are way too old-fashioned for me.

What God Says: Proverbs 1:7 *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline.**

A: Your mom and dad lived in a different era or generation when discipline was more conservative. You must always obey your parents' discipline as long as it is for your own good. You may not agree with the way they discipline, but you still must live by it. Your parents provide you with food, shelter, and a loving home. You must give them love, honor, respect, and obedience. As the scripture passage says, only fools despise wisdom, no matter how old-fashioned it may seem. Do not ignore their rules; accept them, and thank your parents for loving you enough to have rules for you.

Questions to ponder:

- How do you show your ignorance?
- Are your parents old-fashioned?

JULY 8

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO JUDGE OTHERS

Q: I have a friend at school who judges every kid or adult she sees that is fat, in her opinion. If she sees a fat girl, she has to call her a name like pig or lard. And she sometimes says it so loud that the other person can hear her. Then, there was a time when we were at the food court in the mall, and it seemed like every person who walked by was overweight. So she was laughing and pointing and talking loudly about how many fat people there were in this world. My friend is very thin with a nice figure, but her mom is overweight, so I don't know why she would be so judgmental against fat people.

What God Says: Matthew 7:1 *Stop judging, “and you will not be judged.”*

A: Plain and simple, it is wrong to judge others, and here's why. None of us are perfect people. We all have our faults and problems. One person's sin of gluttony is no different from another person's problem with anger or bad attitude or being judgmental. If you want to be judged fairly by God as you try to enter His kingdom, then you must judge in a godly manner with His people here on earth. The only one who has the right to judge is Jesus. Judging others is a terrible sin, and we must be fair to all people so we, too, will not be judged unfairly.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with kids who judge others?

What do you do or say?

Q: I have an extremely difficult time sitting in a car when we go on an outing. After about one hour in a car, I get fidgety and hyper to the point that I can't calm down. I have no patience for sitting in a car. To be honest, I have no patience in anything, but sitting in a car is the worst. I've tried everything to be patient, such as listening to music with headphones or playing video games. But after five minutes, I'm already bored and ready to go crazy. I realize it's not just when I'm riding in a car, because when I took a train recently across the country, I had the same problem—no patience. I need to be more patient in my life, but how do I start?

What God Says: Habakkuk 2:3 *If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.**

A: The key to patience is taking a deep breath, saying a quick prayer, and relaxing. See, the problem is that our lack of patience will not get us to our destination any faster. The same thing is true when we worry. It honestly is a waste of time, because it accomplishes nothing. But remember, time is short here on earth, and we need to use the time effectively as we patiently wait. God says that good things will happen to those who accept His word and patiently wait for His timing. Keep occupied doing the work of God, either in a car or in life, as you wait to get to your destination. God has tons of patience with us; we need to demonstrate that same patience in life.

Questions to ponder:

- What causes you to lose your patience?
- How are you trying to fix it?

JULY 10

HELPING KIDS WHO WORSHIP MATERIAL THINGS

Q: My friend loves clothes and shoes. She has told me that she has enough clothes to wear a different outfit every single day of the school year. And she has well over 75 pairs of shoes. The problem is that she is not satisfied with what she has. She just loves clothes and wants more and more. When a new style comes out that she thinks is cute, she's got to have it, even though she already has several similar outfits in her closet. It's the same thing with shoes. She has every style in every color you can think of, but again, she wants more. There is no question that she worships clothes and shoes more than anything else in the world.

What God Says: *Philippians 3:8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage so I may have Christ.**

A: When you die, you can't take your stuff with you to the grave. Therefore, the value of this stuff is worthless when you die. But the value of your soul by turning to Christ and following Him is priceless when you die. That is the meaning of the verse above. Your friend may enjoy having tons of clothes and shoes, but she shouldn't worship them. In other words, we don't put the value of having material things ahead of the priceless value of following God. Instead, we are to enjoy the things God has given to us here on earth, and be thankful, but not at the expense of worshiping God first and foremost!

Questions to ponder:

- Do you know kids who worship material things?
- How do you try to help them?

JULY 11

MAKING MISTAKES

Q: I tend to make a lot of dumb mistakes in my young life. And I always seem to do the opposite of what God teaches. Like God tells us not to steal or covet in the Ten Commandments, but I was caught stealing a baseball mitt last month, and I'm always jealous of what other people have. I'm not a bad person at all. I enjoy church, and I believe in God. But sometimes, I just do things without thinking, and when that happens, I make big mistakes. It's like God is telling me what to do, and I do the opposite. Just last week, I got in a fight with this little kid because he looked at me weird. Again, doing the opposite of what God teaches.

What God Says: Jonah 1:3 *“Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD.”*

A: When we make big mistakes against God's teaching, we are doing no different than Jonah, who went in the opposite direction of God. The worst mistake we can make is running from God. You need to make a conscious effort to do right, not wrong. You know that stealing is wrong and hurting others is wrong; being envious is wrong, too. So stop doing it! Make a decision to follow God fully, and He will guide you and help you during those times of temptation. Put on the armor of God, and fight evil and temptation.

Questions to ponder:

Name the five biggest mistakes you've made in your life.

How did you resolve them?

JULY 12

DEALING WITH UNHAPPY PEOPLE

Q: My parents are never satisfied with what they have. Right now, we live in a 3,000-square-foot house with four bedrooms and three baths. There are only four of us in the family. It's definitely big enough for our family, but they want a 4,000-square-foot house with an extra bedroom, and I don't know why. Also, my dad drives a nice car, but he wants a 4x4 truck. My mom drives an economical SUV, but now she will only be satisfied with a Lexus SUV. It doesn't matter what they have, it is never good enough, and they always want more. And my dad makes good money to support us, but that's not enough for him, either. How can I get my parents to be happy with what they have?

What God Says: Ecclesiastes 5:10 *Those who love money will never have enough. How absurd to think that wealth brings true happiness.**

A: Unsatisfied people usually turn into greedy people. There are a lot of people in this world who will never be happy with what they have. You read of movie stars and sport stars who have millions of dollars, but they are so unhappy in life. They have all that money and fame and prestige, but no happiness. That just proves that those things are not fulfilling. The only thing that can fill that void is God. Doing things for God and others is more valuable than power and money. Also, remember that everything your parents have belongs to God, and He has given your parents those blessings. Give your life to God, and live for Him. Then you will find out what true happiness is all about.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with people who are never satisfied with anything?

Do you know people like that?

Q: During the summer months, my mom and I moved from Texas to California because of a job opportunity she accepted. The good news is that she got the job. The bad news is that I have to start a new school this September. I'm a fairly quiet person, and I hate starting anything new because it takes me a while to meet new friends. I am scared to death to start at this school. It has a good reputation, but it is so much bigger than my last school that I probably won't find my classes. I won't know anyone, and I will be so lonely.

What God Says: Isaiah 41:13 *I am holding you by your right hand—I, the LORD your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.'**

A: It is always scary to start something new, either a new school or a new job or a new neighborhood. But remember, with God, you are never alone. He will be with you always. You need to pray and ask God to bring nice people into your life so you won't be alone. Continue to pray up to that September day when school starts. If it is possible, try to find a church with a lively youth program as quickly as you can. You may meet new kids who go to the same school and make new friends. God wants to help you through this scary time, so ask Him.

Questions to ponder:

How were your experiences starting at a new school?

Describe your feelings.

Q: I was in a huge dilemma last summer. See, my friends and I had planned this big weekend at the lake with our parents to go water skiing and wakeboarding and doing other fun water activities. However, it turned out that the yearly bash for Christian youth was on the same weekend. It was a Christian rock show plus great preaching from our church pastor for about 10,000 kids. It's a great time to get close to God with singing and dancing and having fun. Many people accept Jesus as their savior during the bash, and I didn't want to miss it. So I decided to go to the bash and not to the lake with my friends. They were very angry with me for doing that, and they have all totally rejected me since that weekend. They no longer want to be my friend because I chose to go to the bash instead of the lake.

What God Says: 2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer rejection.**

A: Unfortunately, you did not have the option of rescheduling your weekend at the lake so you could do both events. Since that wasn't possible, plan another trip with your friends in the future that doesn't conflict with a church youth activity. Good friends will not abandon you for long because you chose the bash over the lake. If they continue to reject you, then they were not truly good friends after all. I can understand them being disappointed but not rejecting you totally. You made a wise choice going to the bash instead of the lake, and God will bless your commitment to keep Him first. Ask God to soften the hearts of your friends.

Questions to ponder:

Describe a situation when you felt rejected.
How did you handle it?

JULY 15

DEALING WITH VENGEFUL KIDS

Q: I have a good friend who is fighting with another girl at my school. My friend has been dating this guy for about six months, and most kids at my school know about it. Well, this one girl who is a year older than we are started talking with my friend's boyfriend, and they became friends. But the other day, my friend's boyfriend and this other girl were spotted at the mall holding hands and kissing. When this got back to my best friend, she was very angry. She has vowed to get revenge on this girl in every way possible, from stealing her stuff to hiding out and jumping her on her way to school, to even more violent actions such as bringing a switchblade to school and taking care of her. This has gone way too far, and I'm scared someone is going to get hurt badly.

What God Says: Psalm 37:8 *Stop your anger! Turn from your rage! Do not avenge others—it only leads to harm.**

A: Revenge is a hateful sin, one that never ends. One person hurts another, then she has revenge on the first girl, then she wants revenge back, and so on. God says it very bluntly: Stop this sin, and turn from your hate. Revenge may give your friend short-term satisfaction, but the long-term consequences are deadly. Maybe it wasn't meant for your friend to be dating this guy. Maybe that guy would have hurt her in the long run. Encourage her to trust God for whatever happens in her life, for He has a reason for everything. We are not to put justice in our own hands. Leave it for the hands of the almighty God.

Questions to ponder:

Do you know any vengeful kids?

How do you deal with them?

If you could, how would you change them?

JULY 16

HELPING KIDS WHO LACK SELF-CONTROL

Q: I have a good friend who can't control herself when it comes to sweets. She is not fat. As a matter of fact, she is beautiful with a thin body. But when she sees candy or cookies or anything sweet, she just can't stop eating them. One time, I had to sell chocolate bars for a fundraiser for my softball team. I brought 24 boxes home with me. My friend came for a sleepover that night. When she saw the chocolate bars, she went nuts. She ate two full boxes (24 bars) all by herself that weekend. She already has some problems with her teeth, and eating all those sweets will not help her. She just can't control herself when it comes to chocolate or sugar, and I don't know how to help her.

What God Says: 2 Peter 1:6 *Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness.**

A: I've heard of people having a sweet tooth, but this is crazy. There is a tremendous amount of damage your friend can do to herself by consuming all that sugar. Not only will it rot her teeth, but her blood sugar level could elevate, which could lead to all sorts of trouble. She definitely needs to control her urges for sweets. Have her read the above verse over and over. Have her pray to God that she can control her cravings. She doesn't have to stop eating sugar altogether, but she needs to control the amount she's consuming at one time. It's important that she does this immediately so nothing serious happens to her.

Question to ponder:

How do you help friends who have little to no self-control?

JULY 17

SELFISHNESS AMONG FAMILY

Q. My big brother will not share anything of his with me. And he will never do anything for me. See, my brother and I are only 15 months apart, so we both like the same stuff. At Christmas or on his birthday, he might get something really cool like a new video game or a skateboard. If I ever ask to use it or play with it, he gets extremely angry and tells me no. What really makes me angry is that I don't have a problem sharing my stuff with him, which I do all the time. Another example is that when he has candy or ice cream or even gum, he will never share it with me even if he has plenty. He is so selfish with everything. We even sleep in the same room, and he won't share his desk so I can do my homework.

What God Says: Mark 10:45 *Even I, the Son of Man came here not to be served but to serve others.**

A: Selfishness is one of the seven deadly sins because it is totally the opposite of what God stands for. Jesus came to this earth to serve and not be served. God teaches us more about giving in the Bible than any other subject. So He is very clear on how he feels about selfish people. Selfish people normally have few friends because of their lack of giving and caring about others. First, you need to talk to your parents to see if they can help change your brother's behavior. If that fails, then you need to pray to God for help and ask Him to change your brother's mind and heart. Whatever you do, don't change the way you are and become selfish like he is. Replacing good with evil will not please God.

Questions to ponder:

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Are they selfish?

How do you deal with selfish siblings?

JULY 18

DEALING WITH A SHY, ABUSED FRIEND

Q: There is a girl in my class who I'm casual friends with, but not close. She has been told all her life how fat and ugly she is and how stupid she is. She's been told this by her family and cousins and also by kids at school. So her self-esteem is almost nonexistent. Needless to say, she is extremely quiet around people. She rarely talks to anyone and is always sitting by herself at lunch. I want to be a closer friend to her, but she doesn't allow anyone to get close to her. She doesn't trust anyone because she has been hurt so many times. How can I break through her shyness and be a better friend?

What God Says: Genesis 26:24 *God said, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you."**

A: How terrible it is for this family to be so cruel to your friend by telling her such evil things. Your friend is trapped in her own shell, and she is shy by force because all of the insults and abuse. But she is not alone, for God will never leave her or abandon her. Encourage your friend to seek a personal relationship with God. She needs comfort that only God can provide through His word and other people. You can help her a lot by being a nice, positive friend and by being complimentary as much as possible. She definitely needs your positive reinforcement.

Questions to ponder:

Why do kids abuse the shy kids?

How would you advise shy kids who are getting abused?

Q: When I was 14 years old, I made a bad decision to join up with a gang. I thought they were real cool, and I wanted to be cool, so I joined up. But every day and night was the same. We would sin against God and other people by stealing, fighting, threatening, and vandalizing. We would do terrible things against innocent people, and the kids in the gang didn't seem to care. Finally, it came to the point that I saw my best friend in the gang get shot by a rival gang, and I realized how dumb this was. I had to stop this sinning and turn my life over to God. But how could God accept such a terrible sinner like me who hurt His people for no reason?

What God Says: Ephesians 2:13 *Now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you once were far away from God, now you have been brought near to him because of the blood of Christ.**

A: We all make bad choices and have big sins in our lives. Always remember that God made you, and He loves you unconditionally and individually. But you must change your heart, leave your sinful life, and follow His way. You can find His way in the Bible. God will always accept you with open arms if you confess your sins, ask for forgiveness, and then turn your life over to Him. God can forgive any sin, no matter how big or small, if you are truly sorry and turn away from sin in the future. But it begins confessing our sin in true humility.

Questions to ponder:

- Is there a sin you repeat over and over again?
- What are you doing to try to solve it?

JULY 20

DEALING WITH THIEVES

Q: There's a kid in the neighborhood who has a bad reputation for stealing and never getting caught. He is extremely popular with all the other kids because he'll take their money as payment for stealing anything they want. For example, my neighbor friend across the street wanted some Nike shoes that cost over \$100. So he gave this kid \$50, and the kid stole the shoes for my friend. Another neighbor friend wanted a really expensive jersey, so for \$60, he got a \$150 jersey. These deals were almost an everyday occurrence, and this kid must have stolen thousands of dollars worth of merchandise. I know it's wrong, but how can I change it without looking like a nerd or getting beat up for turning them in?

What God Says: Mark 8:36 *How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul in the process?**

A: What a terrible way to become popular. I can't believe this kid has stolen so much and never been caught. The problem is that one day, he will get caught, which will destroy his money-making business. God is clear about stealing. It is one of the Ten Commandments that says, "You must not steal" (Exod. 20:15). This kid will get caught; it's just a matter of time. But the sad thing is that his popularity and profits are coming at the expense of his soul. You see, once he gets caught, his popularity and his business will be gone, so what did he gain in the long run? Don't participate in this thievery. I know you might not be able to stop it, but try to show your friends the right way to get things.

Questions to ponder:

How can you help kids who steal all the time?

Do you know anyone like that?

JULY 21

HELPING KIDS WITH STRICT PARENTS

Q: My friend is very smart, and she gets good grades. The problem is that her dad is real strict. If she does not get straight A's on her report card, she gets punished. If she gets a B or lower, it means one week of no TV or music or going out with friends. Her dad makes her study constantly with no phone or TV until all her homework is done. She starts crying in class every time she gets a B on a quiz or test. She is scared to death to get her report card if it is not straight A's. I agree with getting good grades, but putting that much pressure on a kid is ridiculous.

What God Says: Colossians 3:21 *Fathers, don't aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.**

A: Putting that much pressure on a child will damage them for their lives. They will have low self-esteem because they will feel they're never good enough at anything. I wonder why this father is so strict with grades. Maybe his parents were strict with him on grades. But the chain must end now. The Bible doesn't always support parents. The verse above bluntly tells dads not to aggravate their children, or they will quit trying. Somebody needs to reason with your friend's dad quickly and show him the harm he's causing his kid. If he is a believer, read him this passage of scripture. If he's not, then ask him if he loves his daughter unconditionally, no matter what grades she gets. Let him see the pain he's causing her; maybe that will move his heart to change.

Questions to ponder:

What could you do to help your friends with strict parents?

What would you suggest?

JULY 22

GUIDING A FRIEND WITH TEACHER PROBLEMS

Q: My friend and I have a teacher who is extremely inflexible. If you fail a test, there is no make-up test or extra work to help bring up your grade. We had a project due on a Monday, and my friend was really sick with a bad fever and the flu. He had the project done, but because he was ill, he couldn't turn it in until the following day. The teacher not only did not accept the project late, but also gave him an F without even looking at it. Her explanation was that it was late, and that was unacceptable. This teacher is very mean, and all the kids can't stand her. My friend does not want to fail her class, but he doesn't know what to do.

What God Says: Romans 13:4 *The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established for that very purpose, to punish those who are doing wrong.**

A: Your teacher isn't very mean; she is extremely strict and inflexible. She is definitely not an ideal authority figure. God stresses the fact that people in authority are put there to enforce the rules and laws (this is a good thing). Those who don't follow the rules will be punished. The question is this: Is she being fair with the rules and how she enforces them? If she told you the rules of the classroom about tests and turning projects in on time and has been consistent with everyone, then she is being fair. If not, then she is being unfair (which is a bad thing), and she must be reported to the principal. Strict rules are tough, like the military and prisons, but the key is to be fair in communicating what they are and enforcing them fairly and consistently.

Questions to ponder:

- Have you ever had a friend who had teacher problems?
- How did you help them?
- Describe the situation.

Q: I'm lucky that I don't have a lot of chores to do at my house. My biggest chore is to take care of the animals at home. We have two dogs, three cats, and four fish. All I have to do is make sure there is food and water for each animal and clean up all the messes. Well, I enjoy sports and hanging out with my friends after school. I forgot to feed the animals and give them water for over a week. The cats almost died, and the dogs were in bad shape. We took them to the vet, and they all came out okay except for the fish, which died. I felt really bad because it proved how unreliable I was in caring for my pets.

What God Says: Isaiah 50:10 *"Who among you fears the LORD and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the LORD and rely on your God."*

A: The passage above basically says that you can always rely on God, no matter the situation or problem. God wants us to be more like Him—trustworthy, reliable, and full of love. The opposite of reliable is irresponsible and lazy, and God despises those who are lazy. To be more reliable, you must put others ahead of yourself. Your first priority after school must be caring for those animals before playing or any other activity. Unfortunately, your fish died because of your irresponsibility. But later on in life, you'll have even bigger responsibilities, such as a job, a spouse, or even a child. Ask God for help in being more reliable and caring. Put the needs of others ahead of yourself, and you won't need to worry about being unreliable in the future.

Questions to ponder:

Are you reliable?

If yes, give examples.

If no, what are you doing to change this behavior?

JULY 24

HELPING A FRIEND WITNESS

Q: After about six months of talking to my friend about God and Jesus, she finally made the decision to be baptized and surrender to God. She made this decision about three months ago. Since that time, she has been trying to get her parents to come to Christ, but with no success. She is now starting to come to church every week and coming to youth group every Sunday night. But she doesn't know how to witness to her parents. Her mom and dad didn't even come to her baptism. She thinks that since she is so new at this, she must be doing something wrong and needs help. What can I do to help her better witness to her parents?

What God Says: *2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not.**

A: The easiest way for anyone to witness is to just tell their own story. You don't need to be a Bible scholar or a highly religious person. You need to love God with everything and tell people how you surrendered your life to God and what He has done to change your life. When people can see the major changes in your life for the better, then they will want to know your secret. That's when you say that your secret is God and the power of the Holy Spirit. If her parents are reluctant at first, don't give up. Be persistent in witnessing about the greatness of God and show it by your actions. Her parents will love how happy and content their daughter is and may be more willing to learn about God through her.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever helped a friend witness about God?

If so, how?

If not, what would you tell them?

JULY 25

SNOBBY FRIENDS

Q: There are some cheerleaders at my school who are extremely snobby. The group of six girls will not allow anyone to sit at their table for lunch. And they all look the same. When they are not wearing their cheerleading uniforms, they all wear the same brand clothes and shoes and comb their hair the same way. As a matter of fact, if you are not wearing their same brand of clothes and shoes, you are not allowed to talk to them. They are so appearance-conscious, spending every free period in the bathroom fixing their hair or putting on more makeup. They are rude and extremely snobby to all the other girls, and I hate being treated like a second-class citizen.

What God Says: I Samuel 16:7 *People judge by outward appearance but the Lord looks at a person's thoughts and intentions.**

A: God doesn't care about your outward appearance, where you buy your clothes or shoes, or how you wear your hair. He cares about your heart and how you treat others. And it sounds like these cheerleaders treat others like garbage. You need to remember that God blesses those who are humble and punishes those who are self-absorbed. So you need to ignore their snobbish behavior and continue to serve God through positive action. You might even get the last laugh at a 20- or 25-year class reunion to see how "perfect" these snobby girls turned out in the long run.

Questions to ponder:

Name a person you know who is snobby. How do they act?

In your opinion, can snobby people ever change? Explain.

Q: Last weekend, I was in a difficult dilemma. My friend was throwing a big party at her house for all the cool kids at school. It was an invitation-only party for ninth-graders, and only the popular girls and athletic boys were going to be there. I was so excited about being invited that I totally forgot about my great-grandmother's 80th birthday party/family reunion. I knew about this reunion for months before because all my nieces and nephews and cousins were going to be there. Some of them are relatives I've never seen in my life. The reunion was about 300 miles away, so there was no way to go to both events. I had to choose between the party of the year and the family reunion birthday party to which I had previously committed. I decided to go to the reunion with my family.

What God Says: James 4:17 *"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it."*

A: There is no question that you made the right choice. There will always be cool parties at your school, and you are young enough to be invited to many more. But there will only be one 80th birthday party for your great-grandmother. I applaud the choice you made because it was a difficult decision for someone your age. All kids want to be respected and considered cool by their peers. The opportunity you had was one of great distinction among your fellow schoolmates. But you knew what you had to do—keep the commitment with your family. God loves it when a person makes the right choice, especially when a sacrifice is made. Continue doing the right thing when tough choices roll around.

Questions to ponder:

When you have a tough choice, what decision do you usually make?
Describe a tough choice you had to make.

Q: We have a good basketball team and it looks like we have a chance to go to the state championship. The problem is that our leading scorer and rebounder is so conceited that he thinks he's the only reason we might get to the championship game. He is a good player, but we have many good players on our team. This kid walks around bragging about how great he is and how ordinary the rest of us are. And on the court, he is a huge ball hog. Every time he gets the ball, he shoots. He rarely passes the ball to the other kids or to me. But since we are winning, the coach doesn't do anything about it. Nobody on the team wants to play with him, but we do want a championship. How can we deal with such a conceited player?

What God Says: Proverbs 11:2 *"Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."*

A: God blessed your teammate with his talent to play basketball. He needs to use it in the best way to serve Him. But it sounds like he is self-serving, wanting to glorify himself. God is disappointed when kids are full of pride and conceit, but unfortunately, many kids are like that. There is no easy way to deal with this guy's conceit. You want to follow God's teaching, but you also want to win a championship. So continue to show humility both on and off the court as best as you can. Then, after the season or the next season, if this kid is still playing, make a decision about whether you still want to play on the same team. If so, talk to this player and the coach together about this behavior and try to set the rules of teamwork as the season starts.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with a conceited friend?

What could you say to try to change their attitude?

JULY 28

MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS

Q: The other night, I was riding my bike home from a friend's house. As I passed an alley, I heard a lot of screaming and cursing. I snuck over to see what was going on. All of a sudden, I heard gunshots from the alley. As I peeked around the corner, I saw my older brother's best friend standing over a dead body with a gun in his hand. I was scared stiff, so I jumped on my bike and raced home. Now I don't know what to do. Should I just keep quiet, should I go to the police, or should I tell my older brother? If I tell the police or my older brother, I'm afraid someone may come after me for snitching. I don't know what decision to make.

What God Says: Isaiah 51:7 *Listen to me, you who know right from wrong and cherish my law in your hearts. Do not be afraid of people's scorn or other slanderous talk.**

A: You are facing a serious dilemma. When facing a tough decision like this, ask yourself, "What Would Jesus Do?" We know Jesus would do the right thing. And in my opinion, you should do the right thing and report what you saw, first to your parents and then to the police. You are not snitching; you are protecting society and other innocent people from possibly getting hurt by your older brother's best friend. Then, after you do the right thing, you need to trust God and pray to Him to protect you from any backlash or repercussions from your decision. God will protect those who do right, but you need to go to Him in prayer and ask Him for His help.

Questions to ponder:

Name a difficult decision that you've had to make in the past six months. What caused you to make the decision you did?

JULY 29

FRIENDS HIDING NASTY PROBLEMS

Q: My friend is scared to death to tell his parents that he has a drinking problem. My friend is only 13 years old, but he's been drinking alcohol since he was eight. It started with sipping a beer just for fun. But now, he drinks only hard liquor like scotch and whiskey. Most days, he comes to school intoxicated. Since our school is so big and they don't care too much about the kids, he is able to hide it well. The other thing is that my friend's parents don't drink at all, so I don't know where he gets the liquor. His parents are going to be mad and disappointed, and he is scared to death that they might do something drastic like send him to boarding or military school.

What God Says: Deuteronomy 31:7–8 *Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD is the one who goes before you.**

A: An alcoholic at 13 years old is a scary thought. Your friend has a bigger problem than just telling his parents. He needs to get help immediately, or he might wind up dead before he is 16 years old. The first thing your friend must do is realize that he has a problem and needs help. Then, as the verse says, he must be strong and courageous to face his parents with the truth and humbly ask them for their help. But he will not be alone if he allows God to be with him the whole way, strengthening him through the process. He needs to do this immediately before it's too late. And most of all, make sure he doesn't drink anymore.

Questions to ponder:

How would you handle a friend who has a nasty, dangerous problem?

What would you do to help?

Q: Who actually goes to hell? Does my grandfather who drinks and swears and never goes to church go to hell when he dies? Or how about my aunt who is a sweet and wonderful person and has raised eight children on her own but has never gone to church and doesn't know God? Will she go to hell? Or how about my grandmother who went to church and says she believes in God but treats everybody very mean and has never helped anyone with anything? Will she go to hell? How do we know for sure who goes to hell?

What God Says: Jude 1:15 *He will bring the people of the world to judgment. He will convict the ungodly of all the evil things they have done in rebellion and of the insults that godless sinners have spoken against Him.**

A: You ask a lot of good questions that I'm not sure can be answered absolutely. You see, I don't know who goes to heaven or hell, for only God knows the hearts of all individuals. I do know what the Bible teaches that if you have no relationship with God and you don't believe in Jesus Christ as your savior for the forgiveness of your sins, there is no way to atone for your sins. God is extremely fair and will judge each of us according to our hearts for Jesus and how we acted on earth. But to ensure life with God, you need to follow His word in heart and in actions and accept Jesus as your Lord because He died on the cross for your sins.

Questions to ponder:

Who do you think goes to hell?

Knowing what you know, how do you witness to kids about hell?

JULY 31

PEER PRESSURE

Q: My parents hate it when I ask to go out with my friends to this place that is popular with younger kids. I never get to go there with my friends because my parents forbid it. They don't like the place because it is a little dangerous, and there have been a few police arrests in the last six months. But it really is no big deal. So one Friday night, all my friends were asking me numerous times to meet them at this hangout that night because there might be a fight with some kids at a rival school. I really wanted to go, but I knew my parents would be upset when they found out. It turns out that I didn't go. And there was a big police bust, and all my friends were taken to juvenile hall.

What God Says: 1 Kings 11:4-6 *In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship their gods instead of trusting in the LORD, his God. . . . Thus Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely.**

A: What a smart decision you made. Most kids hate it when parents have rules and restrictions because they feel it takes away their freedom. What they don't realize is that it's for their own protection. You made a tough choice by not giving in to the peer pressure, or you would have joined your friends in juvenile hall. Follow God's advice and never let a bad example influence you. You need to choose good kids as friends and not those who want to lead you into harm. Don't do what Solomon did in the verses above, submitting to his wives, giving in to peer pressure, and worshipping other gods. Follow only what is good, and the Lord will be pleased.

Questions to ponder:

When peer pressure is high, do you follow or lead?

Show an example of how you reacted to strong peer pressure.

