

“I have known Pastor Don Meinberg for over 7 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 they are great books for young people going through the tough pre-teen and teenage 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 at 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 4: OCTOBER–DECEMBER

DON MEINBERG

LUCIDBOOKS

Reaching New Heights

God's Answers to Young Teens' Questions

Volume 4: October–December

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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 story 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 young teens 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.

OCTOBER 1

OPPRESSION AT SCHOOL

A: I must be the only guy at my school who prays. Every school day, before I take a bite of my lunch, I say a prayer of thanksgiving. Every time I'm about to take a big test, I say a prayer. Every time there's a football game at my school, I say a prayer. Now all the kids in my class are making fun of me because I pray. They mock me about God, saying things like, "God's telling him all the answers" or "Maybe I should give my crappy lunch to God." They insult me all the time and call me names just because I pray. I enjoy praying to God no matter where I am, but I am getting tired of being picked on because of it. Can't God take this oppression from these other kids away from me?

What God Says: Matthew 5:11–12 *God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers. Be happy about it. Be very glad. For your reward in heaven awaits you.**

A: The more oppressed you are at school for God's sake, the bigger the blessings and rewards you will receive in heaven. As hard as it might sound, we need to remain obedient to God and endure persecution with patience, just as Jesus did when He was persecuted and ultimately killed on the cross. Whatever you do, don't give up hope. Pray that God will give you the strength to endure and the courage to stand up for God to those who are persecuting you. Nothing comes easy when the reward at the end is so great, and God promises a big reward for his followers in heaven.

Questions to ponder:

How would you handle being oppressed at school?

Do you pray before eating? Why or why not?

OCTOBER 2

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

Q: I have a very difficult time communicating with my parents. Every time I try to tell them something that happens to me, good or bad, I know I'm going to get a lecture on what they did with the same thing 25 years ago. You see, my mom is the lecturer in the family, and my dad is the fixer. He thinks I want all my situations fixed, when most of the time I just want them to listen. They think what they are doing is right, but all it's doing is driving me away from ever wanting to talk to them. I love my parents, but I need to figure out a better way to communicate, or we'll never speak to each other.

What God Says: James 1:19 *My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry.**

A: You need to have patience with your parents because, believe it or not, it sounds like they love you a lot and want to help you the best way they can. Read the verse above again. The important thing is to be quick to listen and slow to get angry as they try to teach you from their experiences and wisdom. I know it's difficult sometimes to listen to the same lectures and your mister-I-can-fix-anything dad, but they definitely mean well. Ask God to open your heart to their words and truly listen to what they have to say. You may actually be surprised how useful it could be. And if you want them to listen to you and not talk, respectfully ask them to do that. And that applies to you just as much as it applies to your parents!

Questions to ponder:

How would you rate your communication with your parents on a scale of 1 to 10?

Why?

OCTOBER 3

DEALING WITH OVERLY COMPETITIVE KIDS

Q: Do you know someone who is highly competitive and has to win at everything or they get mad? That is the perfect description of my brother. It doesn't matter what game it is. It could be a one-on-one basketball game or ping-pong or even checkers, but he has to win or he goes crazy. Then when he does win, he brags about how much better he is. I do enjoy competing against him because he is good at most things, and playing against him makes me better. But I can truly do without the over-competitiveness and cocky attitude. What can I do to still play against him but not have to put up with his antics?

What God Says: Luke 18:11 *The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: "I thank You God that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially that tax collector over there."**

A: Kids who are overly competitive unfortunately do become cocky when they win. People who are over-competitive have good points and bad points. Their good point is that they know how to establish goals and give 100% effort to reach that goal. The bad point is that they are difficult to play against because of their attitude, and if they lose, they get mad. If they win, they are cocky and judgmental, just like the Pharisee in the verse above. God says to play the game to win but with good sportsmanship. If you win, be humble about it. If you lose, recognize your opponent's victory and move on, for there will be other days to win.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with overly competitive kids who must win at any cost?

Are you a competitive person? Give examples!

Q: I am very angry with God. See, I was born premature, and when I came out, I had no arms or legs. So I can't do anything for myself. I even need help going to the bathroom. Why was I born with this horrendous disability? Why didn't God give me arms and legs like all the other kids? I hate it because other kids stare at me all the time. Or even worse, they point and whisper to others about me. I'm mad because I can't play sports that I love or even play a musical instrument. I can't do anything like normal kids can. I can't even play outside or ride a bike or skateboard like everyone else. I just wish I had never been born!

What God Says: 1 Corinthians 7:17 *You must accept whatever situation the Lord has put you in.**

A: Unfortunately, we cannot choose our looks or our form, so we need to accept whatever good or misfortune that comes our way. I know you're bitter with your unfortunate disability, but you are alive, and that is a blessing from God. You need to change your heart, accept whatever situation you are in, and use it to glorify God. There have been countless paraplegics and people with disabilities who have lived wonderful, fulfilling lives using their disabilities as an asset rather than a liability. And with technology today, it is common for kids and adults to get prosthetic arms and legs that allow them to do everything a normal child can do. So don't lose faith and hope in God, because He loves you no matter what your disability is. Remember, your body is only temporary, but your soul is forever!

Questions to ponder:

If you had a disability, what kind of attitude would you have toward life?
Would you be angry at God?

OCTOBER 5

DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL FRIENDS

Q: My friend cries at everything. When someone is mean to her, she cries. When someone looks at her the wrong way, she cries. If she gets a B on a test, she cries. She cries at sad movies or even happy movies. So, one day she came to school looking like she had been crying. I wasn't in the best mood, so I didn't ask her what was wrong. I figured it was something dumb, so I ignored her the entire morning. It turns out that her cat that she loved so much and talked about a lot saw something, ran into the street, and got hit by a car. I have a special cat, too, so I knew she was hurting. Now, she's mad at me because I wasn't there when she needed me.

What God Says: Proverbs 21:13 *"Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need."*

A: I think it's wrong and extremely insensitive to shun a friend in time of need. I understand your friend's persistent crying can get old and annoying, but if that's her only fault, that's not so bad. It's like the kid who cries wolf all the time. When something important comes up, nobody is there to help. God teaches us to be sensitive and compassionate to the emotions of others and not shut our ears to their cries. Talk to your friend and apologize for your behavior. Then, calmly explain why you reacted like you did. It's always better to err on the side of sensitivity than on the side of uncaring.

Questions to ponder:

How do you handle emotional friends?

How do you help them?

Have you ever shunned emotional friends by accident?

OCTOBER 6

HELPING KIDS MAKE GOOD DECISIONS

Q: My friend got invited to a concert of her favorite band on the other side of town. She was so excited when she found out that another kid got a ticket for her. The problem is that my friend is only 12 years old, and the kid who got the ticket is 16 years old. There is no way her parents will allow her to go to the concert. They will say the boy is too old and the concert is too far away, and since it's a rock band, they will say the crowd will be too crazy. So my friend decided to lie to her parents and say she's at my house spending the night. Then, she will go to the concert and come back to my house while I cover for her. Her other choice is to tell her parents the truth and take her chances that they will let her go. I begged her to do the latter, but she decided to lie to her parents and go to the concert. What should I do now?

What God Says: Proverbs 12:15 *Fools think they need no advice, but the wise listen to others.**

A: If we reject the advice of a wise person, just like your friend did, she is probably making a very foolish decision. We need to listen to sound advice and weigh it carefully, and then we will make better choices. I think your friend made a foolish choice by going to the concert when she knows her parents would disapprove. You are put in a tough position of lying to her parents to cover her bad decision or risking your friendship and telling the truth. If you cover for her, she'll do it again and again and again. If you tell her parents the truth, you'll probably lose a friend. Pray to God about what to do. But God is all about truth, and He will never support lying to help a friend.

Questions to ponder:

Do you give good advice?

Is it hard to tell your friends no?

Give examples in detail.

Q: My family is in a state of chaos right now. Everything that could go wrong with my family is going wrong. First of all, my mom told my dad that she's having an affair with a guy at work. Instead of getting angry and doing something about it, my dad said and did nothing. Then, my brother stole the family car, took it on a joyride for three days, ditching school, only to come back home with a big dent in the back bumper. Again, my dad said very little and did nothing. Finally, my younger sister got expelled from fourth grade for cheating and then bringing a knife to school. My dad got a little angry but did nothing. Our family is going crazy, and my dad doesn't seem to care.

What God Says: 1 Timothy 3:4 *He [a father] must manage his own family well with children who respect and obey him.**

A: God has appointed fathers to be the spiritual leaders of the family. When a father fails at that responsibility, the whole family suffers. In your family, your dad is not taking a leadership role to help in times of trouble. You need to talk to your dad about taking control of these issues and being the man that God wants him to be. In those families with no fathers, the mom must take on that role as well as the many other roles she already has. Your family will continue to be in chaos if your father sits idly by and does nothing. And you will lose all respect for him.

Questions to ponder:

What is the worst thing that has happened to your family?

If nothing comes to mind, what is the worst thing that could happen to your family?

OCTOBER 8

DEALING WITH FRIENDS FULL OF EXCUSES

Q: I have been trying to get my friend to go to church with me. But every time I ask her, she has one excuse after another. First, it was her sick grandmother who lived out of town. Another week, it was homework and a big test the next day. Two weeks ago, she said she was tired and just didn't feel like it. Then, just last week was the best excuse. She said she wouldn't go to church because her parents don't go and she doesn't think it's right. I've gotten to the point that I'm tired of hearing all these lame excuses, and I'm just going to give up trying.

What God Says: Romans 1:20 *From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and the sky and all that God has made. They can clearly see His invisible qualities—His external power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.**

A: God will accept no excuses for not knowing Him and accepting Jesus as our Lord and savior. All we need to do is look around and see all of His glorious creation. We can't help but marvel at His works. Those who make excuses for not following God and going to church have already made the choice of not believing in Him. There will come a day when your friend will die and wish she was full of love for God rather than full of excuses. We have no excuses; we need to make a choice. But don't give up on your friend, just as God has never given up on us. Read the above verse to her and tell her the time for excuses is past, and it's time to trust in the almighty God.

Question to ponder:

How do you deal with friends who are full of excuses all the time?
Does it frustrate you?

Q: I will never forgive my father for what he has done to my mom. My dad works a lot of hours (or this is what I thought). He goes to work at 6:00 a.m. and usually doesn't come home until after 9:00 p.m. He goes out of town about once a month for about a week at a time. It turns out that my father has been living a double life. You see, he's been dating a woman from work for about a year, going to her house every night, having sex, and just being with her. And these trips he's been taking were also all lies. He never went anywhere; he just stayed at her house the entire week. When my mom found out, she was devastated. I hate my father for what he did, and I will always hate him. I will never get over him ruining our family.

What God Says: Matthew 6:14–15 *“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

A: What your dad has done to ruin your family is wrong and despicable in the eyes of God. His selfishness and deceit are terrible sins, and I can't blame you for the bitterness you feel toward him. However, God teaches us that He will forgive us without limits and that we should forgive others who have wronged us if they are truly sorry. We all sin, and every sin is evil in the eyes of God. If we can't forgive others, then how do we expect God to forgive our wrongdoings?

Grudges give us power over another, but if God (the most powerful force in our universe) does not hold a grudge against us, then, why should we? Healing begins with forgiveness, so get rid of the grudge and begin your life anew.

Questions to ponder:

Do you hold grudges?

What would you have done if your dad did the same thing as the one in this story? Explain.

OCTOBER 10

DOUBTS ABOUT SELF

Q: I live in a really poor, tough neighborhood. There is graffiti everywhere, and we hear gunshots at least two or three times a week. We can't go outside at night, and the noises are loud. There are gangs on every street, and we hear the fighting and bottles breaking on a nightly basis. I am currently 12 years old, and I live alone here with my mom. There's a ton of ways to do wrong in this neighborhood. I don't think I'm strong enough to be able to stay out of trouble as I get older. I'm not confident in myself to say no when a gang member wants me to steal something or hurt someone. My mom taught me the difference between right and wrong, but I'm a follower by nature, so it would be easy for me to follow the crowd. I totally doubt my sense of judgment.

What God Says: Jeremiah 17:7 *"But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence."*

A: You don't ever have to face a situation alone as long as you have God in your life. You're right that it is easy to turn bad, especially in a rough neighborhood like yours. You need to trust in God and let Him shoulder the pressures and burdens of your situation. Let Him give you the strength and courage to face each day with the hope and confidence of doing good. There is nothing that God can't handle. You may have doubts about yourself, but there is no doubt about God's love for you. Pray to Him to keep you strong, and then do what is good and right and pleasing to your father in heaven.

Questions to ponder:

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much confidence do you have in yourself regarding school, skills, and making good choices?

What would you do if you were the boy in this story?

OCTOBER 11

DEALING WITH KIDS WHO CAN'T LOVE

Q: Everyone at my school knows about this guy who lives on a bench on a street corner right across the street from the school. He seems to be completely harmless and wouldn't hurt a fly. He just got hit with some bad times (losing his home and his family), and now he's living on the streets. All of us are nice to him, giving him food from our lunches or lunch money so he can buy his own food. We are all nice except my best friend. He is constantly saying rude remarks to him about what a pig he is or how bad he smells. Instead of helping him, my friend laughs at him and insults him. I don't know why he acts that way because this homeless man has never said or done anything to him.

What God Says: Matthew 10:42 *"If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded."*

A: Doesn't your best friend know that any kind gesture you do for someone like that homeless man is the same as doing it for God? God created this homeless man, and He loves him just as much as He loves your friend. Saying rude remarks, insulting the homeless man, and doing mean things to him is the same as doing those things to God. Most people struggle to understand this, but it's true. Jesus repeats the above verse in Matthew 25:40 when He says, "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" Tell your friend to stop being mean to this guy and show him the love and respect he deserves.

Question to ponder:

How do you try to help kids who struggle with love?

OCTOBER 12

LYING TO COVER WRONGDOING

Q: A kid at school figured out a way to get into the teachers' lounge and get a copy of the big science test we were having the next day. So after we took the test, he naturally was the only kid in class to get 100%. But he made one mistake. On the fill-in-the-blank and essay questions, he answered them identically (word-for-word) as the teacher had written them on the answer sheet. The chances of that happening are 10,000,000 to 1. The teacher figured that the kid had cheated, but he had to prove it. The kid lied about everything, using other kids as witnesses who also lied for him. So he didn't get expelled. As a matter of fact, since no one said anything, he didn't even get in trouble for his cheating. I wonder how he got all those kids to lie for him.

What God Says: Romans 1:18 *God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves.**

A: Lying to cover wrongdoing at this young age will lead to nothing but worse trouble as this kid gets older. This behavior is no different than what common criminals do after committing a crime. They do a heinous act and then try to cover their tracks so they don't get caught. Using kids as alibis to lie for him was a coward's way of not taking responsibility for his actions. I bet he promised all those kids who covered for him a copy of the answer sheet for the next test. God hates lying because God is all about love. To use others to get away with cheating is just wrong. I wish someone would have the courage to step forward and tell the truth, or this kid will do the same thing over and over again.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever lied to help a friend not get into trouble? Explain.
If not, is there a situation that you might? Give details.

OCTOBER 13

OVERWEIGHT AND GLASSES

Q: I have 20-2,000 vision, so I need really thick, powerful glasses just to see. Even with these glasses, I need to sit in the front of the classroom to see the whiteboard. It also doesn't help that I just love food, and I'm about 100 pounds overweight. So I get teased and laughed at on a daily basis. I don't understand why kids tease other kids because they can't see. I can't help it that I was born with bad eyesight; it's not like I want to be half-blind. But every day, just about the same kids call me four-eyes and geek and fat slob. I get tired of the insults, but I don't know what to do to change my situation.

What God Says: Romans 5:3-4 *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation.**

A: Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to change mean kids. If kids want to be cruel and mean, they will find a vulnerable person as a target and go after them. You need to do what the above passage says. Have confidence in yourself to endure the teasing and then use that endurance to develop a strong character, which leads to a better outlook on yourself and life. And this confidence starts with God. You may not be able to change mean kids, but you can arm yourself with the best protection, and that's God's power in you. He will give you the strength and courage to endure this difficult time and make you feel good about yourself.

Questions to ponder:

Why do you think kids make fun of kids who are overweight and wear glasses?

Do you stick up for kids who are teased?

OCTOBER 14

RETALIATION

Q: Last week, my younger brother got beat up as he was walking home from school by a gang of kids from another street. He came home with a busted lip and a swollen face. He was real upset and crying because he said he did nothing but walk down the street. I was real angry, so I talked to some of my friends on the block and told them what happened. They agreed to help me find a kid about the same age as my brother who was involved in the fight and retaliate. We are going to beat him up the same way they beat up my brother. Then, they will know not to mess with me, my family, or anyone on this block.

What God Says: 1 Peter 2:23 *He did not retaliate when He was insulted. When He suffered, He did not threaten to get even. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.**

A: Here is the main problem with retaliation. The street gang hurt your little brother by beating him up, so you get your gang together to beat up one of their kids on that street. Then they get mad and do something worse to someone on your street, and you get real angry and do something really bad (like killing or badly injuring) to another kid on their street, and on and on. The problem is that there is no end to retaliation, and a lot of innocent people get hurt in the process. God teaches us not to retaliate and to try to live like Jesus who did not retaliate when He was being beat and spit on before the cross. Let God be the judge and jury, and don't take matters into your own hands.

Questions to ponder:

In your opinion, is retaliation ever okay?

How would you handle it if your loved one got seriously hurt?

What would you do? Explain.

OCTOBER 15

PROCRASTINATION

Q: I have a science project due this week, and I haven't even started. We need to build a visual aid, do an experiment, and then write a five-page essay discussing the hypothesis, experiment, and results. I've known about this project for two months, but it took me a long time to figure out what to do it on. Then, I waited until I finally got the materials for the experiment. Now, the entire project is due in three days, and I don't know what to do. There is no way I can finish it on time, and the teacher has already said no extensions. I wish I wouldn't have procrastinated so long.

What God Says: Proverbs 6:10–11 *“A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit.”*

A: Sounds like you have a big problem, but you are not alone. Most kids wait until the last minute to do something they should have done long ago. Procrastination is a form of laziness, and it ultimately leads to disaster. You shouldn't wait until the last minute, because if you do, it will show in your shoddy work and written report. God wants you to be responsible, and start on the task early, and do the best you can. Then you will get the reward you deserve. Remember this: Time is a precious gift that God gives us on this earth. It must not be wasted or squandered, because the consequences are huge.

Question to ponder:

Describe the last time you procrastinated about something and it cost you. Do you struggle with procrastination? Explain in detail.

OCTOBER 16

TATTLING BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Q: I have a baby sister who loves to tattle on me. Anytime she sees something I've done wrong, she tells my parents. Or if she hears something that sounds wrong, she tattles on me. She sneaks around the house just looking for things to squeal about. And if I start yelling at her for doing this, she cries to mom and tells her I'm being mean to her. I just can't win! When I complain to my mom about it, she tells me that infamous line, "You are the oldest and should know better." So my little sister never gets in trouble. I can't do anything without her telling someone about it. I'm about ready to strangle her.

What God Says: Isaiah 58:13 *Honor the Lord in everything you do, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly.**

A: People usually tattle or squeal for one of two reasons: first, to hide some wrong they are doing by getting someone else in trouble; and second, for attention. Rarely do kids tattle for the good of someone else. It's usually for the tattler's best interest. Both of these reasons for tattling are not pleasing to God. He calls it idle talk, which means talking but saying nothing productive. In the verse above, God says if you tattle to win your own desire, it is wrong. You need to go back to your mom in a mature, calm manner and explain the wrong your sister is doing. There is nothing good that comes out of tattling at this young age. God is not pleased with the tattler, and the one being tattled on is resentful and full of contempt. Pray to the Lord and try to talk to your mom again.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with tattling brothers and sisters?

Does this apply to you?

OCTOBER 17

SIBLING PROBLEMS

Q: I have a large, blended family. My parents are divorced, and my mom moved across the country, so I'm living with my dad and two brothers. Well, my dad married a woman about a year ago who also has three kids (two girls and one boy). So now there are eight of us living in the same house. The biggest problem is that I don't get along at all with my two stepsisters. First of all, they are extremely mean and bossy and spend hours in the bathroom. We have only three bathrooms for eight people, so you need to be quick. They take all my cool clothes to wear without asking, and they are constantly giving me unwanted advice on my problems. I can't stand having them in my house.

What God Says: Titus 3:2 *They must not speak evil of anyone, and they must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.**

A: It is extremely difficult to have peace and tranquility in a blended family, especially one as large as yours. You did not choose this living arrangement, and yet you have to live with it. Your stepmom and dad need to take charge of the situation. This arrangement is uncomfortable, not only for you but also for the rest of the siblings in your family. Your parents need to have a family meeting to lay down the rules of the home and how to settle conflicts. And you need to read the verse above and ask God to help you stop this quarreling and be patient with this situation. You will not be able to do this alone. You need to have God intervene in bringing peace to your family.

Questions to ponder:

What do you and your siblings fight about?

Discuss your last two fights and how they were resolved.

OCTOBER 18

DEALING WITH STUBBORN FRIENDS

Q: I did something really dumb to one of my best friends. We were supposed to spend the evening together talking and doing girl stuff. But that day, a boy I really like asked me to go to the movies with him and his older brother. I was so excited that I said yes without thinking about my plans with my friend. So I called my friend and told her I wasn't feeling well and I wouldn't make it to her house. So I went to the movies with this boy in a group, and I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw my friend there with her parents. When she saw me, she shouted something and ran crying to the bathroom. I ran after her trying to apologize, but she wouldn't talk to me. I've tried to apologize to her every day, but even to this day (three weeks later), she won't speak to me. She is so stubborn about forgiving and forgetting.

What God Says: Matthew 18:15 *"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back."*

A: Wow! Did you ever make a big mistake. You totally deceived your friend and got caught. The verse above applies to your friend. It would be great if she would go to you privately and express her hurt feelings and lack of trust to you. If she did, you could confess your mistake and apologize. However, in this case, you must be the aggressor and try whatever means to get her to talk to you. You can expect that she will continue to be stubborn because she is deeply hurt, but you must not give up when she shuns you. Go to God in prayer and ask Him for a miracle that your friend will have a change of heart. If you are truly sorry in your heart and it shows, then God will help you mend this friendship in His timing.

Questions to ponder:

How do you handle friends who are stubborn about things?

Do you try to help them? How?

OCTOBER 19

COMFORTING A SAD FRIEND

Q: My friend had a charm bracelet that she loved very much. She loved it mostly because her grandmother, on her death bed, gave it to her before she passed away. My friend wore the bracelet all the time, even when she was asleep. One day, she was changing for PE at school, and she accidentally left the bracelet on the bench in the girls' locker room. When she came back to change into her regular clothes, she noticed that the bracelet was missing. She asked everybody if they saw it, but no one did. She goes to lost and found every day, but no one has turned it in. She has been so sad since that day, and I don't know how best to console her.

What God Says: Psalm 37:5 *“Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you.”*

A: It is so difficult when we lose an item of priceless value because there is no way to replace it. Buying an identical charm bracelet will not have the same value as the one given to your friend by her grandmother. You need to continue to console your friend by just being there so she can have someone to cry with. But read the verse above, give this sad situation to God, and trust Him to make it better. God may not bring the bracelet back to your friend, but He will comfort her. The old saying that time heals all wounds is not necessarily correct. It is more accurate to say that God heals all wounds, for God created time to help us live with a loss. So again, encourage your friend to trust in Him, and He will be her strength.

Questions to ponder:

What would you do if you were the friend in this story?

How would you comfort this person?

OCTOBER 20

PROBLEMS WITH THE LAW

Q: My brother is a good kid who got caught up with a bad group. Every week, he goes to church, and sometimes he helps out in the toddler classroom. Now, there's this group of guys who go to his school and hang out on our street. These guys are thugs, but my brother liked them and wanted to be part of them because they got a lot of attention from girls. They knew my brother went to church, and they also knew that he wanted to join the group. So they told him that if he would steal all the cash in the offering bag and bring it back to them, he was in. See, my brother knew where they stored the cash after the offering was taken. He knew it was wrong, but the temptation was just too great, so he did it. Unfortunately for him, someone saw him, and he got caught. Now, he has a record and a bad reputation, and he's still not part of the group.

What God Says: Proverbs 1:10 *"If sinners entice you, turn your back on them!"*

A: Stealing is a hideous sin, but stealing from God's house is especially horrible. Your brother put more value on this group than he did on the sanctity of God's house. In my opinion, it's worse than just a bad reputation and a criminal record. He has thoroughly disappointed God with his actions, and he got nothing to show for it. God says to turn your back on those who want you to do evil. Walk away from the temptation and don't turn around, because it will only lead you to misery. Your brother must turn to God and ask him for forgiveness for his crime and then confess it openly to the church and make retribution (pay all the money back). Then he needs to vow never to do anything that irresponsible again. God is forgiving, and he will forgive your brother if he asks with his heart.

Questions to ponder:

- Have you ever been in trouble with the law?
- How about your family?
- How about your friends or anyone you know?
- Explain in detail.

Q: I was riding my bike after school toward home when I saw a car I recognized that belonged to my cousin. So I went looking around to see where he was. As I pulled up to a narrow alley, I saw my cousin standing there with four other guys. Then, I saw one of the guys hand my cousin a wad of cash, and my cousin handed the guy a baggie with drugs in it. He did the same thing with the other three guys. I really never realized that my cousin was a drug dealer. As I was leaving the alley, my bike hit a trash can and made a loud noise, which got my cousin's attention. At that point, he realized I knew what he was doing. That night, he came by my house and told me that if I said anything to the police or my family or anyone else, he would literally kill me!

What God Says: Psalm 121:7–8 *The Lord keeps you from all evil and preserves your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.**

A: This is a terrible predicament to be in. You want to do the right thing as God teaches, but you also don't want to get physically hurt by your cousin. In situations like this, it is best to consult God's word where He tells us (like in the above verses) that He will keep us from evil and preserve our life if we trust Him. You need to go to God in prayer and ask Him for guidance in your situation. Listen to your heart, and God will provide an answer for you. My suggestion is to go to your parents or a pastor in confidence and ask for advice. God provides many answers for His people, and they can guide you in the right direction. And put your life in God's hands, and you will always feel safe.

Questions to ponder:

What would you do in this situation?

What do you think God would want you to do?

OCTOBER 22

WASTING TIME, DOING NOTHING

Q: It was the first day of middle school, and the activities for that semester were posted for anyone to join. So my friends and I went to the board to see if there was anything good to sign up for. There must have been over 100 activities we could be involved in. One of my friends asked me to join band with him, but I refused. Another one asked me about cross-country running, but I said no. One by one, my friends were signing up for a couple activities each, but I kept saying no to all of them. By the end of the day, I hadn't signed up for anything. I figured I would just go home after school and play video games, watch TV, play with the dog, or just do nothing.

What God Says: Ecclesiastes 11:6 *Be sure to stay busy and plant a variety of crops, for you never know which ones will grow, and perhaps they all will.**

A: It sounds like you had an opportunity to be involved in numerous organizations, clubs, or sports and decided to do nothing. God teaches us in the verse above to experience as many good things as possible because we don't know which ones we have abilities for or which ones will help us grow in our lives. God works in mysterious ways through people or school activities, and what we may think is dumb or boring may turn out to be the best thing that has ever happened to us. But you will never know if you decide to waste your time away by doing nothing. God hates the idea of us wasting precious time because we are taking God's blessings and throwing them away. So get involved in good, positive activities that bring glory to God.

Questions to ponder:

What activities are you involved in?

What do you think of kids who waste their time?

Do you know kids like that?

Explain.

OCTOBER 23

HELPING A FRIEND THROUGH TRIALS

Q: My friend and I were at a department store looking at all the different shades of lipstick. As we were leaving, a security guard stopped my friend to ask her to open her purse. He saw a brand new lipstick at the bottom of her purse. The guard accused her of shoplifting and told her to go with him upstairs so he could call the police. My friend is a good, honest person, and I know she didn't steal the lipstick. But they handcuffed her and escorted her to the escalator to take her to the waiting room. She was so humiliated. People were staring at her and pointing at her as though she were a common criminal. I didn't know how to help her in this horrendous trial.

What God Says: 1 Peter 4:12–13 *Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through as if something strange were happening to you. Instead be very glad because these trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering, and afterward, you will have the wonderful joy of sharing His glory when it is displayed to all the world.**

A: This may not sound right, but God likes to see us on trial because it gives us an opportunity to put all our faith in Him. Think about this: If your life were perfect and you had no problems, no trials, no tough choices, and everything was just right, then why would you need God in your life? You would feel indestructible, needing no one. But we all know that life is certainly not like that. As the above verses say, trials allow us to be partners with Christ and trust Him to get through any situation. Have your friend put her trust in God so the truth can come out and she will be proved innocent and her good name restored. This is the time for her to run to God to help her through her trial.

Questions to ponder:

If this happened to you, what would you do?

If you knew you were innocent, how would you feel? Explain.

Q: My little sister is really good at gymnastics. From the time she was four years old until now (she's eight), I was her helper and biggest supporter. I never enjoyed gymnastics, but I saw how good she was and got excited for her. Well, last week, she had a gymnastics competition for six- to eight-year-old girls. I was sure she would win at least one event, maybe two or three. It turned out that she didn't win any of the events and only placed in one event (3rd place in the floor exercise). She wasn't too upset, but I was really disappointed at the whole thing. I thought the judging was unfair and that she didn't perform as well as she should. It's been a week, and I'm still feeling a little disappointed over the results of that competition.

What God Says: Nehemiah 8:10 *"Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

A: I think it's wonderful that you have taken such an interest in your sister's gymnastics. While most siblings fight, it's nice to see two sisters who love and support each other. The problem with judged sports like figure skating or gymnastics is that no matter how well you do, it is still up to someone else to decide a winner. You're not in control of the outcome. And often we walk away feeling cheated by the judging. But God says not to be sad and to turn to the Lord for strength and healing. There will be many more days ahead and tons of future gymnastic meets for your sister. One minor setback is nothing as long as she puts her faith in God and continues to train hard.

Questions to ponder:

When was the last time something disappointed you?
How did you handle it?

OCTOBER 25

DEALING WITH FRIENDS WHO WON'T ADMIT THEY ARE WRONG

Q: Have you ever had a friend who never admits they're wrong? Even when you prove they are wrong, they won't admit it. I have a friend just like that, and he never admits to anything. And it's over the dumbest things like when we were talking about the 2003 Super Bowl and I told him that Tampa Bay beat Oakland. He kept telling me that Oakland won, and when I proved to him that he was wrong, he still wouldn't admit his error. It doesn't matter what the subject is or what the outcome might be, right or wrong, in his mind he's always right and everybody else is always wrong. It gets to the point that talking to him is extremely annoying.

What God Says: Hosea 5:15 *Then I will return to My place until they admit their guilt and look to Me for help.**

A: People feel that admitting they're wrong is a sign of weakness. Actually, admitting you're wrong is a sign of maturity and wisdom. God often speaks in the Bible about admitting our faults and confessing our wrongs to others. Until we admit our failures and mistakes, how can we ask for forgiveness? Admitting our failures or faults is a true sign of humility. Unfortunately, people are just too proud to be humbled. As the above verse says, God wants us to admit when we're wrong, because until we do, He can't forgive us. It is extremely annoying to be around someone who always thinks they're right, even when you prove them wrong.

Questions to ponder:

How do you deal with friends who won't admit they're wrong?

Do you have friends like that?

Q: I argue with my sister over the dumbest things. We argue over hair and make-up and which guy is cuter. We argue about who's doing chores and who's going to walk the dogs. We argue a lot about what time to get up in the morning to use the bathroom because we have only one bathroom for both of us. We argue a lot about food and what to make for dinner and who will make it and who will clean up after dinner. One of the biggest things we argue about is music. I like rock and roll, and she likes country western. So we argue about which one is better. We also argue about money and lending each other cash when the other one is broke. We argue about the silliest things 24/7, and I do wish it would stop.

What God Says: 2 Timothy 2:23 *“Again I say, don’t get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights.”*

A: What a total waste of precious time to argue over such petty things when it's truly unnecessary. The answer to every argument is compromise, and in this case, that's what's needed. Set a schedule for chores so you'll know who does what and when. We all have different tastes in hair, makeup, and guys, so both of you can agree that your opinions are different and then move on. Regarding music, both rock and roll and country western are good, depending on your own taste in music. You'll see that you can begin to agree with each other on everything as long as you agree to compromise. God wants us to live in peace, and arguing over foolish things is not wise. Learn from God's teachings, don't get involved in ignorant arguments, and learn to compromise.

Questions to ponder:

Do you like to argue? Why or why not?

How often do you argue with your siblings or friends at school?

OCTOBER 27

DEALING WITH A BITTER FRIEND

Q: My friend had this wonderful idea about how she could win a horse race that happened last weekend. She's an accomplished rider and has a secret method to get her horse to jump higher and run faster. She made the mistake of telling these secrets to a mutual friend. This mutual friend betrayed my friend's trust and told her biggest rival all the secrets my friend had told her. So at the meet, the rival used these secrets and beat my friend's horse by less than one second to win first place. After the race, the rival told my friend, "Thanks for the tips" and proceeded to tell her all the secrets that the mutual friend had told her. My friend was extremely angry and bitter, vowing never to speak to this mutual friend ever again and saying that she will hate her forever.

What God Says: Proverbs 14:10 *"Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully share its joy."*

A: What the verse above means is that your friend's heart will never experience joy until she gets rid of the bitterness. What your mutual friend did was wrong, and once a trust is broken, it is extremely difficult to mend it. But that's where God can help. We saw how betrayal worked in the life of Judas Iscariot who was one of Jesus's 12 apostles. Jesus treated Judas like a brother and treated him the same as all the other apostles. But for 30 pieces of silver, Judas betrayed Jesus and got Him arrested and ultimately crucified. But Jesus never hated Judas or expressed bitterness toward him. As we try to live our lives like Jesus, we must forgive our brothers and sisters and not be bitter. We cannot love others if there is bitterness in our hearts.

Questions to ponder:

How have you helped someone who is bitter?

Did it work?

What do you say or do to help stop the bitterness of friends or family?

OCTOBER 28

HELPING KIDS WHO ARE GREEDY

Q: Why are some kids in this world so greedy? They have everything they need in life, and yet they still want more and are never satisfied. That is a perfect description of this one kid at school. He comes from an upper-middle-class family who is rich compared to the rest of us. But if someone comes to school with a cool backpack or lunch box, he wants it, even though the one he has is brand-new. On a much simpler scale, if he has three or four pencils but I happen to have a mechanical pencil, he wants my pencil in spite of what he already has. He's a spoiled brat kid who only wants more and gives little. That's probably why he has such few friends.

What God Says: 1 John 3:17 *If anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help, how can God's love be in that person?**

A: Greediness is a terrible sin because it treats money and things of this world like something we can worship. Generous giving away of some of our material things is the most effective way to keep us from being greedy. You see, when we see what giving does in the life of other people, we experience a satisfaction that material things can never give. Greediness is the direct opposite of sharing, and those who always want can never be the same person who always gives. The end of your story shows what happens to greedy people. They usually have few friends because they don't know how to give. What is better, having fewer things but lots of friends who love you or having a ton of things and very few people who love you? It seems to me that the first one beats the second one every time.

Questions to ponder:

Do you know greedy kids? How do you deal with them?

If no, how would you deal with greedy kids?

OCTOBER 29

LIKING THE SAME BOY OR GIRL

Q: What do you do when two ninth-grade boys like the same eighth-grade girl, and she likes only one of them? That's the problem my best friend and I have with this one girl at school. She must be the hottest girl in the entire eighth grade, and my friend and I talk about her all the time. Well, the other day, I was talking to her in my science class (my friend is not in the same science class), and some kids overheard her telling me that she really likes me and wanted my phone number. I was thrilled until word got around to my best friend that she liked me. He started to act differently toward me. It was like he was jealous, although he kept denying it. Even to this day, our friendship has never been the same.

What God Says: 1 Samuel 18:9–11 *Saul kept a jealous eye on David. A tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave like a mad man. Saul had a spear in his hand and suddenly hurled it at David intending to pin him to the wall. But David jumped aside and escaped.**

A: When two friends like the same girl (or boy), it usually ends up like this. No matter how good of friends you are, one usually ends up jealous of the other, which leads to a friendship deteriorating. In the verses above, both Saul and David did not like the same woman, but we can see what happens when we get jealous of someone. It leads to envy, then anger, then retaliation, and ultimately evil. God teaches us not to be jealous of anything. There are many hot girls (or cute guys for you girls out there), so there is no reason to be jealous over one. Always remember that boyfriends or girlfriends may last only a short while, but a true friendship can last a lifetime.

Question to ponder:

What would you do if you liked the same boy or girl as your best friend? Has that ever happened to you?

OCTOBER 30

DEALING WITH FRIENDS WHO TALK LOUDLY

Q: My good friend has a deep, powerful voice. He talks in a tone like an adult, but he's only in the eighth grade. The problem is that he can't control how loud he is. Even when it's just the two of us and we're talking right next to each other, he can be heard from far away. I've told him many times how loud he is, but he says he can't help it. It's really embarrassing if we are talking about something personal or about a girl. Everybody who is close by can hear everything he says, and sometimes we get teased or rumors start flying about our conversation. He is a really good friend and we have a lot of fun together, but I don't think I can take his loud voice anymore.

What God Says: Isaiah 32:17 *And his righteousness will bring peace.*

*Quietness and confidence will fill the land forever.**

A: There are many instances where speaking in a loud voice is acceptable to people and to God. Singing songs of praise and preaching His word is wonderful in God's ears, no matter how loud they are. If your heart is filled with the Holy Spirit, then sometimes you just need to shout out your devotion to God. But other times, a loud voice can become irritating. God teaches us that a quiet, soft confidence with a subtle voice brings peace to all. So He urges us to speak softly but from the heart so our words have meaning instead of just loud noise. Regarding your friend, have him try to speak in a whisper when he talks to you, and when he gets excited and his tone rises, calmly ask him to whisper again. He may start getting used to talking with a lower tone. And through prayer and your help, he can hopefully reduce the loudness of his voice. Don't desert him as a friend; instead, support him in this effort to change this annoying habit.

Questions to ponder:

Do any of your friends talk loudly?

Do they sometimes embarrass you?

How do you handle it?

Q: I've been in a church choir for about three years. It's kind of unusual for a ninth-grade boy to be involved in a church choir, but I like church and I love to sing, so it's a natural fit. The problem is that I get teased a lot for singing with all the girls. In our junior high choir, there are 10 girls and no boys. So I sing bass. I've had my fellow church guy friends tease me about this, and one of them told my next-door neighbor who went around telling everybody in the neighborhood that I sing in an all-girl choir. Now all the kids on my block laugh at me. So I decided to quit the choir. I don't want to constantly be treated like a goof.

What God Says: 2 Timothy 4:7 *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful."*

A: God is proud of those who are faithful to Him no matter the cost. If the cost is money, material things, pride, or even accepting insults, God wants us to use our talents to glorify Him. He is thrilled when people endure for His sake. God blessed you with a good singing voice, and you used that talent to praise Him in the church choir. But as God has said many times in the Bible, including the above verse, it's not how you begin the race but how you endure it through all the hardships in life. And unfortunately, you decided to give in to the devil's work and quit singing in God's house. Do you think God was pleased with that decision? Probably not, but God is caring, loving, and forgiving and hopes you reconsider your decision. Don't allow the devil to win this fight. Go back to the choir and honor Him with your voice.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever quit in ministry?

If yes, why?

If no, is there any reason why you would quit ministry work?

Explain!

