
OCHORUS ORIGINALS
5
Rooted
Branching Out: loving your family, your friends, God's family and the world
Ochorus

Rooted – 30 Days with God for Youth – Book 5

Branching Out: loving your family, your friends, God's family and the world

Ochorus Originals

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OCHORUS

About Ochorus

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Matthew 10:8

Table of Contents

About this work — 6

Introduction: Branches That Reach Out — 7

Day 1 — The Greatest Commandment — 10

Day 2 — Honor Your Father and Mother — 12

Day 3 — Brothers and Sisters — 14

Day 4 — Serve One Another — 16

Day 5 — When Parents Say No — 18

Day 6 — As for Me and My House — 20

Day 7 — A Friend Loves at All Times — 22

Day 8 — David and Jonathan — 24

Day 9 — Walk with the Wise — 26

Day 10 — Outdo One Another — 28

Day 11 — The God Who Sees Me — 30

Day 12 — Accept One Another — 32

Day 13 — Seventy-Seven Times — 34

Day 14 — Forgive as He Forgave — 36

Day 15 — Make It Right 38
Day 16 — As Far as It Depends on You 40
Day 17 — Love Your Enemies 42
Day 18 — Overcome Evil with Good 44
Day 19 — One Body, Many Parts 46
Day 20 — Your Gift 48
Day 21 — Honor the Gray Head 50
Day 22 — Welcome the Little Ones 52
Day 23 — Carry Each Other's Burdens 54
Day 24 — Rejoice and Weep 56
Day 25 — Every Nation 58
Day 26 — The Least of These 60
Day 27 — Always Ready 62
Day 28 — Tell Your Story 64
Day 29 — Pray for Everyone 66
Day 30 — By This Everyone Will Know 68
Conclusion: A Tree That Gives Shade 70

About this work

Rooted is an original Ochorus devotional series for readers aged 9 to 12, and this is its fifth book. It begins with the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love your neighbor, and pictures them as a tree: roots going down to God and branches reaching out to people. The earlier books grew the roots. Book 5 is about the branches.

The first week is love at home: honoring parents, brothers and sisters, serving one another, hearing a parent's no, and "as for me and my house." The second is about friends: a friend who loves at all times, David and Jonathan, walking with the wise, Hagar and the God who sees, and welcoming the one on the edge. The third is about forgiveness and peace: seventy-seven times, making things right, being a peacemaker, loving enemies and overcoming evil with good. The fourth is about God's family, the church, and the fifth reaches out to the world, from every nation and the least of these to telling your own story of what Jesus has done.

Every day follows the same short pattern: a Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible, a teaching with a Bible story or a picture from everyday life, a question to think about, one thing to try, and a prayer. The days on honoring parents, forgiveness and bullies make clear that no one should be asked to do something wrong or unsafe, that forgiving is not the same as staying where you can be hurt, and that a reader who is being bullied should tell a trusted adult.

Introduction: Branches That Reach Out

Have you ever sat under a big shady tree on a hot summer day? The sun is blazing, but under those wide branches it's cool and comfortable. Birds build nests in the branches. Squirrels run along them. Kids climb them and hang swings from them. A healthy tree doesn't just stand there. It spreads out its branches and blesses everything around it.

That's a picture of what God wants to do through you.

In the earlier books of Rooted, we talked about growing deep roots in God, walking with Jesus, growing good fruit and standing strong in storms. Now it's time to look **outward**. When God's love fills you up, it doesn't stay inside. It spreads out, like branches, to the people around you.

> *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*
> *— 1 John 4:11 (BSB)*

Notice the order: God loved us first. We don't love others to earn God's love. We love others *because* He loves us. His love flows into us and then out through us.

What's in this book

This is **Book 5** of Rooted. (If you haven't read the others, that's okay! You can start right here.)

- **Week 1 — Love at Home.** Your parents, your brothers and sisters, and your whole family.
- **Week 2 — Friends.** Being a true friend, choosing friends wisely, and what to do when you feel left out.
- **Week 3 — Forgiveness and Peace.** Forgiving people who hurt you, saying sorry well, and what to do about bullies.
- **Week 4 — God's Family.** The church, your gifts, older people, younger kids, and helping each other.
- **Week 5 — Loving the World.** People from every nation, the poor, and telling others about Jesus.

How each day works

Every day takes about five to ten minutes and has five parts:

1. **The verse.** A short passage from the Bible. Read it slowly.
2. **The teaching.** What the verse means, with a Bible story or a picture from everyday life.
3. **Think about it.** A question to think about on your own or with someone.
4. **Try this.** One way to love someone today.
5. **The prayer.** A prayer to pray. Add your own words too!

Tips for branching out

- **Think of real people.** As you read each day, picture someone specific: a brother, a friend, a neighbor.
- **Actually do the "Try this."** This book is about loving people, and love is something you do.

- **Start at home.** It's often easiest to be kind to strangers and hardest to be kind to your own family. Start there anyway!
- **Missed a day? Just keep going.** Love doesn't keep score, and neither does this book.

Jesus said the whole Bible hangs on two commandments: love God and love your neighbor. The roots go down to God. The branches reach out to people. Let's grow some branches!

For parents, grandparents and leaders

Book 5 of *Rooted* is about relationships: family, friends, forgiveness, the church and the wider world. It is written for readers aged 9 to 12 and quotes Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible. Several days touch on sensitive ground. Days 2 and 5 on honoring and listening to parents note that no one should be asked to do something wrong or unsafe. Days 13 and 14 on forgiveness explain that forgiving someone doesn't mean pretending, trusting them right away or staying where you can be hurt. Day 17 on bullies tells readers clearly to tell a trusted adult. You may want to talk through those days together.

Day 1 — The Greatest Commandment

> *"Jesus declared, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"*
> *— Matthew 22:37–40 (BSB)*

One day, an expert in God's law asked Jesus a tricky question: "Teacher, which commandment is the greatest in the Law?"

That was a big question! The Old Testament has hundreds of commands. Rules about worship, food, families, money, farming, and much more. Which one was most important? People argued about it all the time.

Jesus answered with two commandments.

First: love God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Not just a little bit of you. All of you. Your feelings, your life, your thoughts. God wants to be first in everything.

Second: love your neighbor as yourself. Think about how much you care about yourself. You feed yourself when you're hungry. You take care of yourself when you're hurt. You want good things for yourself. Jesus says to care about other people like that.

Then Jesus said something amazing: "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Imagine a coat rack with two big

hooks. Everything in the whole Bible hangs on those two hooks. If you love God and love people, you're doing what every other command is really about.

Here's a way to picture it with our tree. Love for God is like **roots** going down deep. Love for people is like **branches** reaching out. A tree needs both! Roots with no branches would be strange and bare. Branches with no roots would dry up and die.

The first four books of Rooted were mostly about the roots: knowing God and growing close to Him. This book is about the branches: how God's love reaches out through you to your family, your friends, your church and the world.

And notice the order. Loving God comes first. When you're connected to God, His love fills you up so much that it spills over onto others.

Think about it: Why do you think Jesus put loving God first and loving your neighbor second? How are they connected?

Try this: Draw a tree in your notebook with roots and branches. Label the roots "Love God" and the branches "Love people." Write the names of people you want to love better on the branches.

Dear God, I want to love You with all my heart, soul and mind. Fill me up with Your love so much that it spills over onto the people around me. Help me love my neighbors as myself. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2 — Honor Your Father and Mother

"Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."
— Exodus 20:12 (BSB)

When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, the first four were about loving God. The fifth was the first one about loving people. And which people did God start with? Your parents.

"Honor your father and mother."

What does it mean to **honor** someone? It means treating them as important and valuable. It means showing them respect in the way you talk to them, the way you listen, and the way you act.

Honoring your parents might look like:

- Obeying them the first time, without arguing.
- Speaking kindly, not rudely or sarcastically.
- Saying thank you for the things they do for you.
- Helping around the house.
- Not rolling your eyes or slamming doors when you don't get your way!
- Telling them the truth.

Paul pointed out that this is "the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2). God promised that people who honor their parents would

enjoy a good, long life. God designed families so that when kids honor their parents, things go better for everyone.

Notice that the commandment doesn't say, "Honor your father and mother if they're perfect." No parent is perfect! Parents get tired and stressed. They make mistakes. Sometimes they're wrong. But God still asks us to treat them with respect, because He's the one who placed them in our lives.

The same goes for grandparents, stepparents, foster parents or whoever is raising you. God has put them in your life to care for you.

But here's something important to know: honoring your parents never means doing something wrong or unsafe. If any grown-up, even a parent, asks you to do something you know is wrong, or if anyone is hurting you, you should tell another trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor or pastor. God wants you to be safe.

Jesus Himself honored His parents. Even as the Son of God, He obeyed Mary and Joseph when He was growing up. And even while He was dying on the cross, He made sure His mother would be taken care of.

Think about it: What's one way you've shown honor to your parents lately? What's one way you could honor them better?

Try this: Do something today to honor your parents without being asked. Write them a thank-you note, do a chore, or simply obey the first time.

Dear God, thank You for my parents and the people who take care of me. Help me honor them with my words and my actions. When it's hard to obey or be respectful, give me a humble heart. And please bless my family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3 — Brothers and Sisters

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!"
— Psalm 133:1 (BSB)

If you have brothers or sisters, you know they can be your best friends and your biggest annoyances, sometimes on the same day! They borrow your stuff. They get more attention. They copy you. They know exactly how to push your buttons.

The Bible is full of brothers and sisters who didn't get along. Cain and Abel. Jacob and Esau. Joseph and his jealous brothers. Martha and Mary. Sibling fights have been happening for a very long time!

But look at what David wrote: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!" *Harmony* is a music word. It's when different notes are played together and they sound beautiful instead of clashing. Brothers and sisters are different from each other. But when they get along, it's beautiful.

Think about Jacob and Esau. They were twins, but they fought from the very beginning. Jacob tricked Esau and stole his blessing, and Esau was so angry that Jacob ran away from home for twenty years. When Jacob finally came back, he was terrified. He thought Esau would attack him.

But when Esau saw Jacob coming, he ran to meet him. He hugged him and kissed him, and they both cried (Genesis 33:4). After twenty years, they were brothers again.

Here are some ways to live in harmony with your siblings:

- **Don't keep score.** "He got more!" "It's my turn!" Try letting them go first sometimes.
- **Say sorry quickly.** Don't let a fight sit there all day.
- **Stand up for each other.** Be on their side when someone else is mean to them.
- **Celebrate them.** When your sibling does something great, cheer for them instead of being jealous.
- **Remember they're young too.** Especially younger siblings. They're still learning, just like you.

If you don't have brothers or sisters, these ideas still work with cousins, friends and kids at church. God's family is full of brothers and sisters!

Think about it: What causes the most fights between you and your siblings (or cousins or friends)? How could you help make more "harmony"?

Try this: Do something kind for a brother, sister or cousin today. Share something, help them with something, or tell them something you like about them.

Dear God, thank You for my family, even when we don't always get along. Help me live in harmony with my brothers and sisters. Help me not to keep score, to say sorry quickly and to celebrate them instead of being jealous. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4 — Serve One Another

> *"For you, brothers, were called to freedom; but do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Rather, serve one another in love."*
> *— Galatians 5:13 (BSB)*

Picture a family dinner. When it's over, there's a table full of dirty dishes. One person gets up and starts clearing the table. Everybody else suddenly remembers they have something very important to do in another room.

Sound familiar?

Paul says followers of Jesus have been "called to freedom." Jesus set us free from sin and from trying to earn God's love. That's amazing news! But Paul says not to use that freedom as an excuse to be selfish: "do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." *The flesh* means the selfish part of us that wants its own way.

Instead: "**serve one another in love**."

Serving means doing something helpful for someone else, especially something they need, even if you'd rather be doing something else. And the best place to practice serving is at home.

Why? Because home is where it's hardest! It's easy to be helpful at a friend's house, where everyone will think you're so polite. But at home, with the people who see you every day, it's easy to be lazy and selfish.

Here are some ways to serve at home:

- Clear the table without being asked.
- Help a younger sibling with their homework or get them a snack.
- Fold the laundry, even if it's not all yours.
- Bring your mom or dad a glass of water.
- Take out the trash before anyone reminds you.
- Make someone else's bed as a surprise.

Serving isn't always fun. But remember who we're following. Jesus said He "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). The King of the universe knelt down and washed His friends' feet. When you serve your family, you're being like Jesus.

And here's a secret: serving makes a home happier. When everyone is trying to serve each other instead of waiting to be served, it changes the whole feeling of a family.

Think about it: What's one job at home that you usually try to get out of? What if you did it cheerfully, as a way of serving?

Try this: Be a "secret servant" today. Do three helpful things at home without being asked, and don't tell anyone you did them.

Dear Jesus, You came to serve, not to be served. Help me use my freedom to serve others in love, especially my family. Take away my selfishness, and give me a cheerful heart to help. In Your name, Amen.

Day 5 — When Parents Say No

> *"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother. For they are a garland of grace on your head and a pendant around your neck."*
> *— Proverbs 1:8–9 (BSB)*

"Can I go to the sleepover?" "No." "Can I get that game?" "No." "Can I stay up later?" "No." "Can I have a phone?" "Not yet."

Sometimes it feels like parents say no to *everything*. And it's frustrating! You might think they just don't understand, or they don't want you to have fun, or they're being unfair.

King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs, and he started it with advice for young people: "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother." (This is for daughters too!) To *forsake* means to throw away or ignore.

Why should you listen? Solomon says your parents' teaching is "a garland of grace on your head and a pendant around your neck." A garland was a beautiful crown of flowers, and a pendant was a necklace. In other words, your parents' wisdom makes your life beautiful. It's like jewelry you wear.

Here's something to remember: parents can often see things you can't see yet. They've lived longer. They know about dangers you might not know about. They can see where a choice might lead. When they say no, it's usually because they love you and want to protect you.

Think about a lifeguard at a swimming pool. When the lifeguard blows the whistle and says, "No running!" it might feel annoying. But the lifeguard isn't trying to ruin your fun. They've seen kids slip and get hurt.

Does that mean you can never disagree? No. You can respectfully ask, "Can you help me understand why?" You can calmly share how you feel. But in the end, God asks you to trust and obey the people He's put in charge of you. (And remember: if any grown-up ever asks you to do something wrong or unsafe, you should say no and tell another trusted adult.)

And here's the good news: when you respond to "no" with a good attitude, parents often learn they can trust you with more "yeses" as you grow!

Think about it: What's a "no" from your parents that frustrated you? Can you think of a reason they might have said it, out of love?

Try this: The next time your parents say no, try responding with, "Okay," and a calm attitude, instead of arguing. Later, if you want, you can respectfully ask why.

Dear God, sometimes it's hard when my parents say no. Help me listen to their instruction and trust that they love me. Give me a good attitude, even when I'm disappointed. Thank You for giving me people who care about me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 6 — As for Me and My House

"But if it is unpleasing in your sight to serve the LORD, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!"
— Joshua 24:15 (BSB)

Joshua was an old man now. He had led God's people into the Promised Land, and they had won many battles with God's help. Before he died, Joshua gathered all the people together for one last big speech.

He reminded them of everything God had done: how God had rescued them from Egypt, led them through the desert and given them this land. Then Joshua gave them a choice. All around them, people worshiped false gods. Would Israel follow those gods, or would they serve the one true God?

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," Joshua said. And then he made his own choice very clear: "**As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD!**"

Joshua wasn't just deciding for himself. He was deciding for his whole family. He wanted his house to be a place where God was loved and followed.

You're not the leader of your family. That's your parents' job. But you can still help make your home a place where God is honored. Here are some

ways:

- **Pray for your family.** Pray for your parents, your siblings and your grandparents by name.
- **Be an example.** Let your family see Jesus in the way you treat them.
- **Share what you're learning.** Tell your family about something you read in the Bible or learned at church.
- **Suggest praying together.** Ask if your family could pray before meals or at bedtime.

Maybe not everyone in your family follows Jesus. That's hard. But you can still pray for them every day. In the New Testament, a young man named Timothy learned about faith from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). Faith often spreads through families, one person at a time. God might use you to help your family know Him.

Every family faces a choice, just like Israel did. You can decide, "As for me, I will serve the Lord." And you can pray that your whole house will too.

Think about it: What's one thing you could do to help make your home a place where God is honored?

Try this: Write down the names of everyone in your family. Pray for each one by name today. Keep the list and pray for them every day this week.

Dear God, as for me, I choose to serve You. Please bless my family. Help each person in my home know You and love You. Use me to be a good example and to help make my home a place where You are honored. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7 — A Friend Loves at All Times

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."
— Proverbs 17:17 (BSB)

Have you ever had a friend who was really fun to be around when things were going well, but disappeared when things got hard? Maybe when you got in trouble, or when you were sad, or when someone else became more popular, they didn't want to be around you anymore.

People sometimes call those "fair-weather friends." They're around when the weather is sunny, but when a storm comes, they're gone.

Proverbs describes a different kind of friend: "A friend loves at **all times**." Not just when it's easy. Not just when you're fun. All the time.

The second part of the verse says "a brother is born for adversity." *Adversity* means hard times. A true friend is like a brother or sister who shows up when life gets hard. That's when you find out who your real friends are.

What does a true friend look like?

- They stick with you when you're going through something hard.
- They tell you the truth, even when it's hard to hear.
- They don't talk about you behind your back.
- They're happy when good things happen to you.
- They forgive you when you mess up.
- They help you follow God, not pull you away from Him.

Now, here's the important part: instead of only asking, *Do I have friends like that?* ask, *Am I a friend like that?* You can't control whether other people are good friends. But you can choose to be one.

And here's the best news of all: you have a friend who loves at all times, perfectly. Jesus told His disciples that He didn't call them servants anymore. He called them **friends** (John 15:15). He never leaves when things get hard. He never talks about you behind your back. He never stops loving you. He even laid down His life for you. Jesus is the best friend anyone could ever have.

And when you know Jesus is your friend, you can be that kind of friend to others.

Think about it: Who is a friend who has loved you "at all times"? Are you that kind of friend to others?

Try this: Think of a friend who is going through something hard right now. Send them a note, call them or sit with them today.

Dear Jesus, thank You for being the friend who loves me at all times. Help me be that kind of friend to others: loyal, honest, kind and there for them when things are hard. Thank You for the good friends You've given me. In Your name, Amen.

Day 8 — David and Jonathan

"After David had finished speaking with Saul, the souls of Jonathan and David were knit together, and Jonathan loved him as himself... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. And Jonathan removed the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt."
— 1 Samuel 18:1, 3–4 (BSB)

After David defeated Goliath, King Saul brought him to the palace. And there David met Saul's son, Prince Jonathan.

The Bible says their souls were "knit together." They became best friends. Jonathan made a **covenant** with David, a serious promise to always be loyal to him. Then he took off his royal robe, his sword, his bow and his belt, and gave them to David.

That was a big deal. Jonathan was the prince. Someday he was supposed to become king. But Jonathan knew God had chosen David to be the next king instead. And rather than being jealous, Jonathan gave David his royal robe, as if to say, *I know God has chosen you, and I'm on your side.*

Later, King Saul became jealous of David and tried to kill him. Saul was Jonathan's own father! But Jonathan stayed loyal to David. He warned David about Saul's plans and helped him escape, even though it put Jonathan in danger and made his father furious.

And once, when David was hiding in the wilderness, afraid and worn out, Jonathan went to find him and helped him find strength in God (1

Samuel 23:16). That's the best thing a friend can do.

Here's what David and Jonathan's friendship teaches us:

Good friends aren't jealous. Jonathan could have seen David as a rival. Instead, he celebrated what God was doing in David's life.

Good friends are loyal. Jonathan stuck with David even when it cost him a lot.

Good friends point you to God. Jonathan didn't just cheer David up. He strengthened his faith.

Good friends are generous. Jonathan gave David his best things.

Is there someone in your life who is a Jonathan to you? Can you be a Jonathan to someone else?

Think about it: Which of Jonathan's qualities (not jealous, loyal, pointing to God, generous) is hardest for you as a friend?

Try this: Be a "Jonathan" to a friend today. Encourage them in their faith, celebrate something good in their life, or give them something that means something to you.

Dear God, thank You for the friendship of David and Jonathan. Help me be a friend like Jonathan: loyal, generous, never jealous, and always pointing my friends to You. And please give me friends like that too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9 — Walk with the Wise

"He who walks with the wise will become wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."
— Proverbs 13:20 (BSB)

Have you ever noticed that after you spend a lot of time with a friend, you start talking like them? You use the same words, laugh at the same things and like the same shows. Friends rub off on each other!

That can be a really good thing, or a really bad thing. It depends on who your friends are.

Proverbs says, "He who walks with the wise will become wise." If you spend time with people who love God, make good choices and treat others kindly, you'll grow in those things too. But "the companion of fools will be destroyed." In the Bible, a *fool* isn't someone who isn't smart. A fool is someone who ignores God and makes foolish, harmful choices. If those are the people you spend the most time with, you'll start to become like them.

The apostle Paul put it this way: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Think about a basket of apples. If one apple is rotten, and you leave it in the basket, soon the apples around it start to rot too. It doesn't usually work the other way around. The good apples don't make the rotten one fresh again.

Does this mean you should only be nice to kids who are "good"? No! Jesus was kind to everyone, including people others looked down on. We should be friendly and kind to everyone.

But there's a difference between being **kind** to someone and choosing them as your **closest** friends, the ones who shape who you become. Your closest friends should be people who help you follow God, not pull you away from Him.

Here are some questions to ask about your close friends:

- Do they encourage me to do what's right?
- Do I feel pressure to do things I know are wrong when I'm with them?
- Do they respect my faith?
- Am I becoming a better person because of this friendship?

And flip it around: are you the kind of friend who helps others become wise?

Think about it: Think about your closest friends. Are they helping you become wiser, or pulling you the wrong way?

Try this: Thank a wise friend today for being a good influence on you. Tell them one specific way they've helped you.

Dear God, help me choose friends who will help me become wise and follow You. Help me be kind to everyone, but wise about who my closest friends are. And help me be a friend who helps others become wise too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 10 — Outdo One Another

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Outdo yourselves in honoring one another."
— Romans 12:10 (BSB)

Kids love competitions. Who can run the fastest? Who can eat the most pancakes? Who can get the highest score? Who can hold their breath the longest?

Paul gives us a competition too. But it's a surprising one: "Outdo yourselves in **honoring** one another."

In other words, have a contest to see who can show the most respect and kindness to others! Try to beat everyone at being generous, encouraging and thoughtful. Imagine a group of friends where everyone is trying to out-kind each other. That would be an amazing group to be part of!

Paul also says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." *Devoted* means loyal and committed. It's the kind of love family members have for each other. Paul is saying Christians should love each other like a family.

Here are some ways to "outdo" others in honor:

- Be the first to say hello to someone new.
- Give compliments freely and mean them.
- Let someone else have the best seat, the first turn or the biggest piece.
- Notice when someone is left out, and include them.

- Remember people's birthdays and important days.
- Celebrate other people's successes, even when you wish they were yours.

Jesus gave us a simple rule that sums it all up: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). People call this the **Golden Rule**. Before you speak or act, ask yourself: *How would I want to be treated if I were them?*

Sometimes we wait for other people to be nice to us before we're nice to them. But Jesus doesn't ask us to wait. He asks us to go first. Be the friend you wish you had. Start the kindness. You might be surprised how quickly it spreads.

Think about it: What's one way someone has "honored" you that made you feel really cared for? How could you do that for someone else?

Try this: Have a secret "honor contest" today. See how many people you can honor, encourage or put first before bedtime. Keep track in your notebook!

Dear God, help me be devoted to others with brotherly love. Help me go first in showing kindness and honor, instead of waiting for others. Help me treat others the way I would want to be treated. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 11 — The God Who Sees Me

"So Hagar gave this name to the LORD who had spoken to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'Here I have seen the One who sees me!'"
— Genesis 16:13 (BSB)

Have you ever felt invisible? Maybe you walked into the lunchroom and there was no place to sit. Maybe your friends made plans without you. Maybe you weren't invited to a party that everyone else was talking about. Maybe you were picked last, again.

Feeling left out is one of the loneliest feelings in the world.

Hagar knew that feeling. She was a servant in Abraham and Sarah's household. She was far from her home country, and she had no power and no rights. When things went badly between her and Sarah, Hagar was treated harshly. So she ran away into the desert, alone, with nowhere to go.

Hagar probably thought nobody cared about her. Nobody would even notice she was gone.

But by a spring of water in the middle of the wilderness, the angel of the LORD found her. He called her by name. He knew where she had come from and what she was going through. And He gave her a promise for the future.

Hagar was amazed. She gave God a new name: "**You are the God who sees me.**"

Out of everyone in the Bible, Hagar is the one who gave God that name. A servant girl, alone in the desert, who felt invisible. God saw her.

If you feel left out or invisible, remember Hagar. God sees you. He knows your name. He knows exactly where you are and what you're feeling. You're never invisible to Him.

And here's something else. Once you know what it's like to feel left out, you can become someone who notices others. Look around the lunchroom, the playground or your classroom. Is there someone sitting alone? Someone who looks like they don't fit in? You can be the one who sees them, the way God saw Hagar.

Sometimes the kindest thing you can do is simply say, "Want to sit with me?"

Think about it: Have you ever felt invisible or left out? How does it help to know God is "the God who sees me"?

Try this: Look for someone today who seems left out. Sit with them, talk to them or invite them to join in.

Dear God, You are the God who sees me. Thank You that I am never invisible to You, even when I feel left out. Help me notice people who feel alone, and help me be kind to them the way You've been kind to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 12 — Accept One Another

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring glory to God."
— Romans 15:7 (BSB)

Every school has them: the kids on the edges. Maybe they dress differently. Maybe they talk differently, or come from a different country, or have a disability. Maybe they're shy, or awkward, or just new. And often, they get left out, laughed at or ignored.

Jesus was always noticing people on the edges. He ate dinner with tax collectors, people everyone else hated. He touched people with leprosy, whom nobody else would touch. He talked with a Samaritan woman, whom most people avoided. He welcomed children when His disciples tried to send them away.

The religious leaders complained about it. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!" (Luke 15:2). But Jesus didn't care about being popular. He cared about people.

Paul says, "Accept one another, then, **just as Christ accepted you**." Think about that. How did Christ accept you? Did He wait until you were perfect? Until you were cool enough, or smart enough, or good enough? No! He accepted you just as you were, with all your mistakes and weird parts.

If Jesus welcomed you like that, how can we refuse to welcome others?

To *accept* someone means to welcome them, make room for them and treat them as someone who belongs. It doesn't mean you have to agree with everything they do. It means you treat them with love and respect, because they matter to God.

Here are some ways to accept people on the edges:

- Learn their name and use it.
- Invite them to play, sit with you or join your group.
- Stand up for them when others make fun of them.
- Ask about their interests and really listen.
- Don't join in when others exclude them.

Paul says accepting others brings "glory to God." When we welcome people the way Jesus welcomed us, it shows the world what God is like.

Think about it: Who is someone on the "edges" at your school, church or neighborhood? What would it look like to accept them the way Christ accepted you?

Try this: Learn the name of someone you don't know well who seems left out, and use it when you talk to them.

Dear Jesus, thank You for accepting me just as I am. Help me accept others the same way, especially people who are different from me or left out. Give me the courage to welcome people, even if it's not popular. In Your name, Amen.

Day 13 — Seventy-Seven Times

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!'"
— Matthew 18:21–22 (BSB)

Peter thought he was being very generous. Some teachers in his day said you should forgive someone three times. So Peter doubled it and added one. "Up to seven times?" He probably expected Jesus to say, "Wow, Peter, that's amazing!"

But Jesus said, "Not just seven times, but **seventy-seven** times!"

Jesus didn't mean you should count to seventy-seven and then stop forgiving. He meant: *Stop counting.* Forgiveness shouldn't have a limit.

Then Jesus told a story. A servant owed his king a huge amount of money, more than he could ever pay back in a thousand lifetimes. When the king was about to sell him and his family, the servant begged for mercy. And the king felt compassion and **canceled the whole debt**!

But then that same servant went out and found another servant who owed him a small amount, just a few months' pay. He grabbed him and demanded that he pay back what he owed. When the man couldn't pay, the first servant had him thrown in prison.

When the king heard about it, he was furious. "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you?"

Do you see the point? **God has forgiven us a huge debt.** Every sin we've ever committed, He forgave through Jesus. Compared to that, the wrongs other people do to us are small. When we remember how much we've been forgiven, it becomes easier to forgive others.

Forgiving doesn't mean saying what the person did was okay. It doesn't mean pretending it didn't hurt. And it doesn't mean you have to trust them again right away, or let them keep hurting you. If someone keeps hurting you, tell a trusted adult.

Forgiveness means **letting go of revenge**. It means you stop keeping a list of what they owe you, and you give the whole thing to God. It's like the king canceling the debt.

Forgiveness is hard. But it sets you free. Holding a grudge is like carrying a heavy backpack everywhere you go. Forgiveness lets you put it down.

Think about it: Why do you think remembering how much God has forgiven us helps us forgive others?

Try this: Is there someone you haven't forgiven? Tell God about it today, and ask Him to help you let go of the debt.

Dear God, thank You for forgiving me so much. Help me forgive others the way You have forgiven me. When someone hurts me, help me let go of revenge and give it to You. Set me free from carrying grudges. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 14 — Forgive as He Forgave

"Bear with one another and forgive any complaint you may have against someone else. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
— Colossians 3:13 (BSB)

Yesterday we learned that we should keep forgiving. Today we'll look at *how*: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

How did the Lord forgive you?

He forgave you completely. Remember Psalm 103? He removed your sins "as far as the east is from the west." He doesn't hold on to a little bit of them just in case.

He forgave you before you deserved it. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us "while we were still sinners." He didn't wait for us to get our act together.

He forgave you at great cost. Forgiveness wasn't free for God. It cost Jesus His life on the cross.

He doesn't keep bringing it up. When God forgives, He doesn't throw your sins back in your face every time you mess up.

Jesus showed us what this looks like. While He hung on the cross, in terrible pain, with people mocking Him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

That's the kind of forgiveness God wants to grow in us. And honestly, it's impossible to do on our own! When someone really hurts us, everything inside wants to hurt them back. That's why we need God's help.

Here are some steps that can help:

- **Be honest with God.** Tell Him how much it hurt. He can handle your feelings.
- **Remember how you've been forgiven.** Think about how much God has forgiven you.
- **Choose to forgive.** Forgiveness is a choice before it's a feeling. You can say, "God, I choose to forgive them," even if you don't feel like it yet.
- **Pray for them.** It's really hard to stay bitter at someone you're praying for.
- **Keep choosing.** Sometimes the hurt comes back. When it does, choose to forgive again.

Remember, forgiving someone doesn't mean you have to pretend nothing happened, or that you should keep being around someone who is unsafe. If someone is hurting you, tell a trusted adult. You can forgive someone and still stay safe.

"Bear with one another" means to be patient with people's weaknesses and annoying habits, the way God is patient with ours.

Think about it: Which part of how God forgave you is hardest for you to do for others?

Try this: Think of someone who has hurt you. Say out loud, "God, I choose to forgive [name]." Then pray one kind thing for them.

Dear Lord, You forgave me completely, before I deserved it, at great cost. Help me forgive others the same way. When it's hard, remind me how much You have forgiven me. Help me choose to forgive, even before I feel like it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 15 — Make It Right

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."
— Matthew 5:23–24 (BSB)

The last two days, we talked about forgiving people who have hurt *us*. Today, let's flip it around. What about when *we* are the ones who hurt someone?

Jesus said something surprising. Imagine you're at the temple, about to give an offering to God. That's an important, holy moment. But then you remember: *Oh no. My friend is upset with me because of something I did.*

What should you do? Jesus said: stop! Leave your gift right there. Go make things right with your friend first. **Then** come back and worship God.

Wow. Jesus is saying that making peace with people matters so much to God that it's even more urgent than bringing Him an offering. We can't be right with God while refusing to make things right with others.

To be **reconciled** means to be brought back together after being apart. It means fixing a broken relationship.

How do you make things right? It starts with a real apology. A real apology is more than a mumbled "sorry." Here's what a good apology includes:

1. **Say what you did.** "I'm sorry I made fun of your drawing in front of everyone."
2. **Don't make excuses.** Not "I'm sorry, but you were being annoying." Just "I'm sorry."
3. **Say how it hurt them.** "That must have been really embarrassing."
4. **Make it right if you can.** "I'll tell them I was wrong." Or, if you broke something, offer to fix or replace it.
5. **Ask for forgiveness.** "Will you forgive me?"

Watch out for fake apologies like "I'm sorry you feel that way" or "I'm sorry if you got upset." Those aren't really apologies. They put the blame on the other person.

Apologizing is hard. It takes humility. Your face might get hot, and you might feel embarrassed. But making things right is one of the bravest and most Christlike things you can do. And it usually makes you feel so much lighter afterward.

Think about it: Is there anyone who has "something against you" right now? Why do you think it's so hard to apologize?

Try this: If there's someone you need to make things right with, go and do it today, using the five steps of a real apology.

Dear God, forgive me for the times I've hurt others. Give me the humility and courage to go and make things right. Help me give real apologies, without excuses. Thank You that You care so much about peace between people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 16 — As Far as It Depends on You

"If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone."
— Romans 12:18 (BSB)

Abraham and his nephew Lot had a problem. They were both very rich, with huge flocks of sheep, goats and cattle. But there wasn't enough grass and water for all of their animals in one place. Their herdsmen started fighting.

Abraham was the older one. He was the leader. He had every right to pick the best land for himself. But instead, he said to Lot, "Please let there be no contention between you and me." And he let Lot choose first! "If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left." (You can read the story in Genesis 13.)

Lot chose the best-looking land, the green, well-watered valley. But Abraham kept the peace. And God blessed Abraham anyway, promising him all the land he could see in every direction.

Abraham was a **peacemaker**. He cared more about peace than about getting his way.

Paul says, "If it is possible **on your part**, live at peace with everyone." Notice those words: *on your part.* You can't control other people. Some people will want to fight no matter what you do. But you can control your part. You can do everything you can to make peace.

Here are some ways to be a peacemaker:

- **Let some things go.** Not every little annoyance needs a fight.
- **Be willing to go second.** Like Abraham, sometimes you can let the other person choose.
- **Don't take the bait.** When someone tries to start an argument, you don't have to join in.
- **Look for solutions.** Instead of arguing about who's right, ask, "How can we fix this?"
- **Help others make peace.** When friends are fighting, you can help them talk it out instead of taking sides.

Sometimes, even when you do your part, the other person won't make peace. That's okay. That part isn't on you. You can pray for them and keep being kind. And if someone is being unsafe, go to a trusted adult.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). When you make peace, you look like your Father in heaven.

Think about it: Is there a conflict in your life right now where you could do "your part" to make peace?

Try this: The next time you feel an argument starting, try one of the peacemaker ideas above instead of fighting.

Dear God, help me be a peacemaker. As far as it depends on me, help me live at peace with everyone. Help me let things go, be willing to go second and look for solutions. Thank You that peacemakers are called Your children. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 17 — Love Your Enemies

"But to those of you who will listen, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."
— Luke 6:27–28 (BSB)

Jesus said some hard things. But this might be the hardest: "Love your enemies."

Who are your enemies? Maybe there's a kid at school who always makes fun of you. Maybe someone spreads rumors about you, pushes you around or leaves you out on purpose. Maybe there's someone who just seems to hate you, and you don't even know why.

This is sometimes called **bullying**, and it hurts. If you're being bullied, please know it's not your fault. You don't deserve it. And God sees what's happening to you.

Before we talk about what it means to love enemies, here's something really important:

Loving your enemies does not mean letting them keep hurting you. If someone is bullying you, hurting you or making you feel unsafe, **tell a trusted adult**: a parent, a teacher, a school counselor or a pastor. Keep telling until someone helps. That's not tattling. Tattling is trying to get someone in trouble over something small. Telling is trying to get help when someone is being hurt. God wants you to be safe.

So what does it mean to love your enemies? Jesus explains it:

- **"Do good to those who hate you."** Don't try to get even. Be kind anyway.
- **"Bless those who curse you."** When they say mean things, don't say mean things back.
- **"Pray for those who mistreat you."** Ask God to change their hearts.

Love doesn't mean you have to be best friends with someone who hurts you. It means you refuse to hate them back. You treat them with basic kindness, and you want what's truly good for them, including that they would know God.

David showed this kind of love. King Saul chased him and tried to kill him. Once, David had the perfect chance to kill Saul in a cave. His men said, "Do it!" But David refused. He wouldn't harm Saul, even though Saul was trying to harm him (1 Samuel 24). David left it in God's hands.

And the greatest example is Jesus. We were God's enemies because of our sin, and Jesus loved us anyway. He died for the very people who were against Him.

This kind of love is impossible on our own. But with God's help, He can grow it in you.

Think about it: Who is someone who is hard for you to love right now? What's one way you could "do good" to them or pray for them?

Try this: Pray for someone who has been unkind to you. Ask God to bless them and change their heart. And if someone is hurting you, tell a trusted adult today.

Dear Jesus, loving my enemies is so hard. Please help me not to hate people who are mean to me, but to pray for them instead. Give me courage to tell a grown-up when I need help. Thank You that You loved me when I was Your enemy. In Your name, Amen.

Day 18 — Overcome Evil with Good

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Carefully consider what is right in the eyes of everybody... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
— Romans 12:17, 21 (BSB)

The king of Aram was at war with Israel. But every time he planned a secret attack, the king of Israel somehow knew about it and avoided the trap. The king of Aram was furious and wanted to know who the spy was. His officers told him it wasn't a spy at all. It was Elisha, the prophet of Israel, who told the king of Israel even the words spoken in the king of Aram's bedroom!

So the king of Aram sent a whole army to capture Elisha. They surrounded the city at night with horses and chariots. But God struck the soldiers so they couldn't see clearly, and Elisha led them right into the middle of Israel's capital city, surrounded by Israel's army!

The king of Israel was excited. "Shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"

But Elisha said, "Do not kill them... Set food and water before them." So the king threw a great feast for the enemy army! They ate and drank, and then he sent them home. And the Bible says the raiding parties from Aram stopped coming into Israel (2 Kings 6:8–23).

The enemy army came to capture. Instead, they got a feast. And the fighting stopped.

That's what Paul means: "**Overcome evil with good.**"

When someone does something wrong to us, our natural reaction is to pay them back. They pushed me, so I'll push them. They said something mean, so I'll say something meaner. But when we do that, evil wins twice: once when they did wrong, and again when we did wrong back.

Paul says, "Do not be overcome by evil." Don't let evil make you evil. Instead, beat it with good. Think of it like putting out a fire. You can't put out a fire by adding more fire. You put it out with water.

A few verses earlier, Paul quotes Proverbs: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink" (Romans 12:20). That's exactly what Elisha did!

Responding to evil with good doesn't mean ignoring wrongs or staying where you're unsafe. It means refusing to take revenge, and trusting God to make things right. And sometimes, like with the army from Aram, kindness changes everything.

Think about it: When someone does something wrong to you, what's your first reaction? What would "overcoming evil with good" look like instead?

Try this: The next time someone is unkind to you, try responding with kindness instead. See what happens.

Dear God, when people do wrong to me, I want to pay them back. Help me not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. Help me leave revenge to You and respond with kindness instead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 19 — One Body, Many Parts

"The body is a unit, though it is composed of many parts. And although its parts are many, they all form one body. So it is with Christ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it."
— 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27 (BSB)

Imagine if your body was made up only of eyes. You could see really well! But you couldn't hear, smell, walk or eat. Or imagine if your body was just one giant ear. You'd hear everything, but how would you get anywhere?

Paul used this funny picture to teach about the church. The church is like a **body**, and Jesus is the head. Every person who follows Jesus is a part of that body. Some are like eyes, some like hands, some like feet. They're all different, but they all belong, and they all need each other.

Paul wrote, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you.' Nor can the head say to the feet, 'I do not need you'" (1 Corinthians 12:21). Every part matters.

Here's what this means for you.

You are part of the body right now. Not someday, when you're older. Right now! Kids are not the "future of the church." You're part of the church today. God has a place for you.

You don't have to be like everyone else. Some people are great at teaching, some at singing, some at encouraging, some at fixing things, some

at noticing people who are sad. God made you on purpose to be the part He wants you to be.

Every part is important. Some parts get noticed more, like the pastor or the worship leader. But some of the most important parts of your body are ones you never see, like your heart and your lungs! In the church, the person who quietly sets up chairs or prays for others is just as important as the one on stage.

We need each other. Paul also said, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). When you stub your toe, your whole body feels it! In God's family, we care about each other's joys and sorrows.

Church isn't just a building or a meeting. It's a family, a body, and you belong in it.

Think about it: What "part" of the body do you think God might have made you to be? What are you good at, or what do you love to do?

Try this: This week at church, do one thing to help "the body." Help a teacher, welcome a visitor, or thank someone who serves behind the scenes.

Dear God, thank You for making me part of the body of Christ. Thank You that I belong, right now. Help me find my place and do my part. Help me value everyone else's part too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 20 — Your Gift

"As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, each of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve one another."
— 1 Peter 4:10 (BSB)

Imagine getting an amazing birthday present, maybe a brand-new bike. But instead of riding it, you leave it in the box in your closet. Months go by. The bike never gets used. What a waste!

Peter says God has given every one of His children a **gift**. Not a bike, but abilities and talents He wants you to use. And He doesn't want those gifts sitting in a closet. He wants you to use them "to serve one another."

What kind of gifts? Here are a few:

- **Encouraging.** Knowing just what to say to cheer someone up.
- **Helping.** Seeing what needs to be done and doing it.
- **Teaching.** Explaining things so others understand.
- **Creativity.** Art, music, writing, building or cooking.
- **Hospitality.** Making people feel welcome and at home.
- **Compassion.** Noticing and caring for people who are hurting.
- **Leading.** Helping a group work together.
- **Giving.** Loving to share what you have.
- **Praying.** Faithfully bringing others to God.

Maybe you already know what your gifts are. Maybe you're still figuring it out. Here are some clues: What do you love doing? What do other people say you're good at? When do you feel most alive while helping someone?

Peter calls us "good **stewards**." A steward is someone who takes care of something that belongs to someone else. Your gifts don't really belong to you. They belong to God. He loaned them to you so you could use them for Him.

And notice what the gifts are for: "to serve one another." Your gifts aren't just for you to be famous or impressive. They're for blessing others. If you can draw, you could make a card for someone who's sick. If you're good at math, you could help a classmate who's struggling. If you love music, you could sing for older people at a nursing home.

You don't have to wait until you're grown up. Start using your gifts now, right where you are.

Think about it: What do you think your gifts might be? How could you use one of them to serve someone this week?

Try this: Ask a parent or friend, "What do you think I'm good at?" Then use that gift to help someone today.

Dear God, thank You for the gifts You've given me. Help me discover them and use them, not to show off, but to serve others. Help me be a good steward of what You've given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 21 — Honor the Gray Head

"You are to rise in the presence of the elderly, honor the aged, and fear your God. I am the LORD."
— Leviticus 19:32 (BSB)

When Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple, two very old people were waiting there.

One was a man named **Simeon**. God had promised Simeon that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Savior. For years, maybe decades, Simeon waited. When he saw baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms and praised God: *Now I can die in peace, because I have seen Your salvation!*

The other was a woman named **Anna**. She was very old too, at least eighty-four. She had spent most of her life in the temple, worshiping God and praying day and night. When she saw Jesus, she thanked God and told everyone about Him. (You can read about them in Luke 2:25–38.)

Out of everyone in Jerusalem, God chose two elderly people to recognize His Son and welcome Him. They had spent long lives walking with God, and they knew Him well.

God cares about older people. In Leviticus, He told His people to "rise in the presence of the elderly." In those days, standing up when an older person came into the room was a way of showing respect. It said, *You matter. Your life and your wisdom are important.*

Our world often ignores older people. They might move slowly, tell long stories or not understand technology. Some are lonely, especially those

who live in nursing homes or whose families live far away. But God says to **honor** them.

Here are some ways to honor older people:

- **Listen to their stories.** Ask them what life was like when they were your age.
- **Ask about their faith.** Many have walked with God for a long time and have amazing stories of His faithfulness.
- **Be patient.** Slow down for them.
- **Help them.** Carry groceries, open doors or help with chores.
- **Visit them.** A visit from a young person can brighten a lonely day.
- **Say thank you.** For their prayers, their wisdom and what they've done.

You might be surprised at how much you can learn from someone who has lived a long life with God.

Think about it: Who is an older person in your life? What could you learn from them?

Try this: Call, write to or visit a grandparent or another older person this week. Ask them to tell you about a time God helped them.

Dear God, thank You for the older people in my life. Help me honor them, listen to them and learn from them. Please bless them and take care of those who are lonely. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 22 — Welcome the Little Ones

"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all.' Then He had a little child stand among them. Taking the child in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me welcomes not only Me, but the One who sent Me.'"
— Mark 9:35–37 (BSB)

Jesus' disciples had been walking along the road, arguing. When they got to the house, Jesus asked, "What were you discussing on the way?" Nobody answered. They were too embarrassed. They had been arguing about which of them was the **greatest**.

So Jesus sat down and taught them. "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all."

Then He did something unexpected. He called a little child over and had them stand right in the middle of the group. He took the child in His arms and said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes **Me**."

In Jesus' day, little children weren't considered very important. They couldn't do much. They couldn't give you anything or make you look good. But Jesus said that when you welcome a little child, you're welcoming Him!

Now, you're not a little child anymore. You're growing up! And that means there are kids younger than you who look up to you: little brothers and sisters, cousins, kids at church, neighbors, kids in younger grades at school.

It's easy to think younger kids are annoying. They follow you around. They want to play baby games. They ask a million questions. But Jesus says that how you treat them matters. When you're kind to a younger kid, you're being kind to Jesus.

Here are some ways to welcome younger kids:

- Play a game they like, even if it's "too young" for you.
- Be patient when they ask questions.
- Include them instead of shooing them away.
- Help them when they're struggling.
- Set a good example. They're watching you and copying what you do!

Younger kids notice how older kids treat them. You have the chance to be someone they remember as kind, the way Jesus is kind.

Think about it: Who are some younger kids in your life? How do you usually treat them?

Try this: Spend some time today with a younger kid. Play with them, read to them or help them with something, and do it cheerfully.

Dear Jesus, thank You for welcoming children. Help me welcome younger kids the way You do. Make me patient and kind, and help me set a good example for them. When I serve them, help me remember I'm serving You. In Your name, Amen.

Day 23 — Carry Each Other's Burdens

"Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
— Galatians 6:2 (BSB)

When the Israelites were in the desert, an army called the Amalekites attacked them. Joshua led the soldiers into battle. Moses went up on a hill overlooking the battle, holding up the staff of God in his hands.

Something amazing happened. As long as Moses held his hands up, Israel was winning. But whenever he got tired and lowered his hands, the enemy started winning.

The battle went on and on. Moses' arms got heavier and heavier. He couldn't keep them up any longer.

So two men, Aaron and Hur, did something simple. They found a stone for Moses to sit on. Then they stood on either side of him and **held up his arms**, one on each side, until the sun went down. And Israel won the battle (Exodus 17:8–13).

Moses couldn't do it alone. He needed friends to hold up his arms.

That's what Paul means: "Carry one another's burdens." A *burden* is something heavy. It might be something you can see, like a heavy box. But usually it's something inside: sadness, worry, stress, a hard situation, a problem that feels too big.

Everyone carries burdens sometimes. And God never meant for us to carry them alone. That's one reason He put us in families and in the

church, so we can help carry each other's loads.

How can you carry someone's burden?

- **Notice.** Pay attention when someone seems sad, stressed or quiet.
- **Ask.** "Are you okay?" or "Is something wrong?"
- **Listen.** Sometimes people just need someone to hear them.
- **Pray.** Pray for them, and maybe even with them.
- **Help.** Do something practical, like helping with homework, bringing a meal or doing a chore for them.
- **Stay.** Be there, even if you don't know what to say.

And remember: it's okay to let others carry your burdens too! If you're struggling, tell someone. Letting others help you is part of being in God's family.

Paul says that when we carry each other's burdens, we "fulfill the law of Christ," which is to love one another the way He loved us.

Think about it: Is there someone in your life who is carrying a heavy burden right now? How could you help "hold up their arms"?

Try this: Ask someone today, "How are you really doing?" and listen carefully to their answer. Then pray for them.

Dear God, thank You that I don't have to carry my burdens alone. Help me notice when others are carrying something heavy, and help me carry it with them. And help me let others help me when I need it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 24 — Rejoice and Weep

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep."
— Romans 12:15 (BSB)

This verse sounds simple. But it's actually one of the hardest things to do.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. When something good happens to someone else, be happy with them!

That sounds easy, until your friend wins the award you wanted. Or gets picked for the team when you didn't. Or gets the new phone you've been asking for. Then it's not so easy, is it? Instead of rejoicing, we feel jealous. We might even hope something goes wrong for them.

Rejoicing with others means celebrating their good news as if it were your own. It means pushing jealousy aside and saying, "That's amazing! I'm so happy for you!" and meaning it.

Weep with those who weep. When someone is sad, be sad with them.

That sounds easy too. But often, when people are sad, we don't know what to do. So we avoid them. Or we try to fix it too fast: "Cheer up! It's not that bad!" Or we change the subject.

In the book of Job, Job lost almost everything: his children, his health and his wealth. When his three friends heard about it, they came to comfort him. They were so shocked by his suffering that they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one said a word, because they saw how great his pain was (Job 2:13).

That was the best thing Job's friends did! (Later, when they started talking, they said a lot of unhelpful things.) Sometimes the best thing you can do for a sad friend is not to talk at all. Just be there. Sit with them. Let them cry.

Remember, Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. He didn't rush their sadness. He entered into it.

Both of these, rejoicing and weeping with others, come from the same place: love that thinks about other people more than yourself. When you love someone, their joys become your joys, and their sorrows become your sorrows.

Think about it: Which is harder for you: rejoicing with others when good things happen to them, or weeping with others when they're sad?

Try this: Today, celebrate someone's good news, no matter how small. And if you know someone who is sad, just be with them.

Dear God, help me rejoice with people who are happy, without being jealous. And help me weep with people who are sad, without rushing them or avoiding them. Give me a heart that loves others the way Jesus does. In His name, Amen.

Day 25 — Every Nation

"After this I looked and saw a multitude too large to count, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."
— Revelation 7:9 (BSB)

Close your eyes and imagine the biggest crowd you've ever seen. Maybe at a stadium, a parade or a concert. Now imagine a crowd so big that no one could ever count it. Millions and millions of people, stretching as far as you can see.

And they're not all the same. Look closely! There are people with every color of skin. People wearing clothes from every culture. People speaking every language in the world. Some came from big cities, some from tiny villages, some from jungles and deserts and islands.

And they're all standing together before the throne of God and before Jesus, "the Lamb," worshiping Him together.

That's what John saw in a vision of heaven. And it tells us something wonderful: **God's family is from everywhere.** "Every nation and tribe and people and tongue." (*Tongue* means language.)

There are thousands of languages spoken in the world today. God loves people who speak every one of them. The good news about Jesus isn't just for one country, one culture or one color of skin. It's for everyone.

That means a few things for us:

Every person matters. No matter where someone is from, what they look like or what language they speak, they are made in God's image and loved by Him.

We should welcome people who are different. If heaven will be full of people from every nation, we can start practicing now! Be kind to kids from other countries and cultures. Learn about where they're from. Maybe learn a few words in their language.

We should care about the whole world. Many people in the world have never heard about Jesus. There are still languages that don't have a Bible. God wants everyone to hear the good news.

Some day you'll be part of that huge crowd, standing next to brothers and sisters from all over the world. Won't that be amazing?

Think about it: Why do you think God wanted His family to include people from every nation and language?

Try this: Find a map or globe. Pick a country you don't know much about. Learn one thing about it, and pray for the people who live there.

Dear God, thank You that Your family includes people from every nation, tribe, people and language. Help me love and welcome people who are different from me. Please help people all over the world hear about Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Day 26 — The Least of These

"'For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you visited Me'... And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'"
— Matthew 25:35–36, 40 (BSB)

Jesus told a story about the end of time, when He will come back as King. He said He will turn to some people and say, "When I was hungry, you fed Me. When I was thirsty, you gave Me a drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed Me. When I needed clothes, you gave them to Me. When I was sick, you took care of Me. When I was in prison, you visited Me."

And the people will be confused. "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You? When did we see You sick or in prison?"

Then Jesus will say something amazing: "Whatever you did for one of **the least of these** brothers of Mine, you did for Me."

Who are "the least of these"? They're people the world often ignores. The poor. The hungry. The sick. The lonely. Strangers and refugees. People in prison. People who can't pay you back.

Jesus says that when you help one of them, you're helping **Him**. Jesus is so closely connected with people who are hurting that caring for them is caring for Him.

That changes how we see people. The homeless man on the street corner. The lonely kid at school. The sick neighbor. The family who just moved here from another country and doesn't speak much English. Jesus says, *When you look at them, see Me.*

You might think, *I'm just a kid. What can I do?* More than you think! Here are some ideas:

- Help your family pack meals or donate food to a food bank.
- Give some of your clothes or toys to a family who needs them.
- Make cards for kids in a hospital.
- Visit a lonely neighbor, or an older person in a nursing home.
- Welcome a new kid who just moved to your school.
- Give part of your allowance to help people in need.
- Pray for people in prison and their families.

Serving "the least of these" isn't a way to earn God's love. We serve because we've already been loved by Him, when we were needy too.

Think about it: Who are "the least of these" in your community? How could you help one of them?

Try this: Talk with your family about one way you could help people in need together this month, and make a plan to do it.

Dear Jesus, thank You for caring so much about people who are hurting and forgotten. Help me see You in them. Show me how I can help the hungry, the sick, the lonely and the stranger. Whatever I do for them, I want to do for You. In Your name, Amen.

Day 27 — Always Ready

"But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you. But respond with gentleness and respect."
— 1 Peter 3:15 (BSB)

Imagine a friend at school asks you, "Why do you go to church?" or "Do you really believe in God?" or "Why are you always so kind to everyone?"

What would you say?

Peter says to "**always be prepared**." Be ready, so that when someone asks about your faith, you have something to say.

Notice what people will ask about: "the reason for the **hope** that is in you." When you follow Jesus, you have a hope that other people might not have. You're not afraid of death. You know you're loved. You have peace in hard times. People notice that, and sometimes they get curious.

You don't need to know all the answers to every hard question. You don't need to be a Bible expert. You just need to be ready to share, simply and honestly, why you believe in Jesus and what He means to you.

Here's one simple way to explain the good news:

- **God made us and loves us.**
- **We have all sinned, which separates us from God.**
- **Jesus, God's Son, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and He rose again.**

- **Anyone who trusts in Jesus is forgiven and becomes part of God's family forever.**

You could also just share what Jesus has done for you: how He helps you when you're scared, how He forgave you, how He gives you peace.

And look at how Peter says to share: "**with gentleness and respect**." Don't argue or try to win. Don't make fun of what other people believe. Don't be pushy. Be kind. Listen to their questions. Treat them with respect, even if they disagree.

And if someone asks a question you can't answer? It's totally fine to say, "That's a great question. I don't know, but I'll try to find out!" Then ask a parent or pastor.

The first part of the verse is important too: "In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord." That means making Jesus the most important person in your life. When He's first in your heart, it will show, and people will want to know why.

Think about it: If a friend asked you, "Why do you believe in Jesus?" what would you say?

Try this: Practice! Tell a parent, sibling or friend the four-sentence version of the good news above, or write down what Jesus means to you in a few sentences.

Dear Jesus, help me make You the Lord of my heart. Help me always be ready to share the hope I have in You. Give me the right words, and help me share with gentleness and respect. In Your name, Amen.

Day 28 — Tell Your Story

"But Jesus would not allow him. 'Go home to your own people,' He said, 'and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy He has shown you.' So the man went away and began to proclaim throughout the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed."
— Mark 5:19–20 (BSB)

There was a man who lived among the tombs, outside a town. He was tormented by evil spirits. He was so wild and strong that no chains could hold him. Day and night, he cried out and cut himself with stones. Everyone was afraid of him.

Then Jesus came. With just a word, Jesus set the man free. When the people from the town came out to see what had happened, they found the man sitting calmly, dressed and in his right mind.

The man was so grateful that he begged to go with Jesus. He wanted to travel with Him and be one of His disciples. But Jesus said no. Instead, Jesus gave him a different job: "Go home to your own people, and **tell them how much the Lord has done for you**."

And the man did! He went all over the region, a group of ten towns called the Decapolis, telling people what Jesus had done for him. "And everyone was amazed."

Notice that Jesus didn't tell him to preach a sermon, memorize a lot of Bible verses or go to Bible college first. He told him to share his **story**: what

Jesus had done for him.

You have a story too! Maybe you think, *My story isn't exciting. I wasn't set free from evil spirits.* But every story of Jesus is amazing, because every one is a story of God's mercy.

Your story might include things like:

- How you first learned about Jesus.
- When you decided to trust Him.
- A time He answered your prayer.
- A time He helped you when you were scared or sad.
- A way He's changing you.

Nobody can argue with your story. It's what happened to you! And sometimes a simple story from a friend opens someone's heart more than anything else.

Jesus also sent the man "home to your own people." Sometimes the hardest people to tell are the ones closest to us. But your family and friends are exactly who Jesus wants you to tell.

Think about it: What has Jesus done for you? What's one part of your story you could share with someone?

Try this: Write your story in your notebook: a few sentences about what Jesus has done for you. Then share it with one person this week.

Dear Jesus, thank You for everything You've done for me and all the mercy You've shown me. Help me not to keep my story to myself. Give me courage to tell my family and friends how much You've done for me. In Your name, Amen.

Day 29 — Pray for Everyone

"First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be offered for everyone—for kings and all those in authority—so that we may lead tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity. This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
— 1 Timothy 2:1–4 (BSB)

Who do you usually pray for? Probably yourself, your family, maybe your friends. Those are great things to pray about!

But Paul says to pray for "**everyone**." That's a big list!

Paul mentions a few specific kinds of prayer. *Petitions* and *prayers* mean asking God for things. *Intercessions* means praying on behalf of someone else, standing in the gap for them before God. And *thanksgiving* means thanking God for people.

Then Paul says to pray "for kings and all those in authority." That means leaders: presidents, prime ministers, governors, mayors, judges, police officers, principals and teachers. When Paul wrote this, the rulers of the Roman Empire weren't friendly to Christians. Some were cruel. But Paul still said to pray for them!

Why? Because God is in charge of the whole world, and He can work through leaders to bring peace. And because God cares about leaders' souls too.

Look at the end of the passage. God "wants **everyone** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God loves every single person in the world. He wants all of them to know Jesus. When we pray for everyone, we're praying with God's own heart.

That means we can pray for:

- **Leaders** in our country and around the world.
- **Missionaries** who are telling people about Jesus in other places.
- **People who don't know Jesus yet**, including friends, neighbors and family members.
- **Countries** where Christians are persecuted for their faith.
- **People going through disasters,** wars or hard times you hear about in the news.
- **People you don't like!** (Remember Day 17.)

You might not be able to travel around the world. But through prayer, you can help people all over the globe. Prayer is like a superpower that lets a kid in their bedroom make a difference on the other side of the planet.

Think about it: Who is someone you've never prayed for before, but should? What about a leader, a missionary or a country?

Try this: Make a prayer list with five categories: a leader, a missionary, a country, someone who doesn't know Jesus, and someone who's having a hard time. Pray through it today.

Dear God, thank You that You love every person in the world and want everyone to be saved. I pray for [name a leader], for missionaries around the world, for [name a country], and for people who don't know You yet, especially [name]. Help me pray for everyone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 30 — By This Everyone Will Know

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."
— John 13:34–35 (BSB)

How can people tell that someone is a follower of Jesus?

You might think it's by the cross necklace they wear. Or by the fact that they go to church. Or by how many Bible verses they know. Those things are good. But Jesus gave a different answer.

On the night before He died, Jesus sat at supper with His disciples, just after washing their feet. And He gave them a **new commandment**: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another."

The commandment to love wasn't new. But the standard was: "**As I have loved you.**" Not just love like normal people love. Love the way Jesus loves. Serving, sacrificing, forgiving, patient, kind. The kind of love that washes feet and goes to the cross.

Then Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." Love is how the world will recognize us. It's like a family resemblance. When people see Christians loving each other and loving others the way Jesus does, they'll say, *Those people must belong to Jesus.*

Look back at this whole book. That's what we've been learning for 30 days. How to love your parents, your siblings and your family. How to be a

true friend, choose friends wisely and welcome people who are left out. How to forgive, make peace, say sorry and even love your enemies. How to be part of God's family at church, using your gifts, honoring older people, welcoming younger ones and carrying each other's burdens. And how to love the whole world: every nation, the least of these, and everyone who hasn't heard about Jesus yet.

It's a lot! And none of us does it perfectly. But remember where love comes from: "As I have loved you." You can love others because Jesus has loved you first. His love fills you up, like water filling roots, and then it flows out through your branches to everyone around you.

That's what it means to branch out.

Think about it: Which day of this book challenged you most? What's one person you want to love better because of it?

Try this: Look back at the tree you drew on Day 1. Add any new names to the branches. Then do one loving thing for someone on your tree today.

Dear Jesus, thank You for loving me so much. Help me love others the way You have loved me. Let my love for others show the world that I belong to You. Keep filling me with Your love, so it flows out to everyone around me. In Your name, Amen.

Conclusion: A Tree That Gives Shade

What a journey! For 30 days, you've been learning how God's love branches out through you.

You started with the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Roots going down, branches reaching out.

You learned about **love at home**: honoring your parents, living in harmony with your brothers and sisters, serving your family, listening when your parents say no and helping make your home a place where God is honored.

You learned about **friends**: being a friend who loves at all times, being loyal like Jonathan, walking with the wise, outdoing others in kindness, remembering that God sees you when you feel left out, and welcoming people on the edges.

You learned about **forgiveness and peace**: forgiving seventy-seven times, forgiving as the Lord forgave you, making things right, being a peacemaker, loving your enemies (while staying safe) and overcoming evil with good.

You learned about **God's family**: being part of the body of Christ, using your gifts, honoring older people, welcoming younger kids, carrying each other's burdens, and rejoicing and weeping together.

And you learned about **loving the world**: God's family from every nation, serving the least of these, being ready to share your hope, telling your story and praying for everyone.

That's a big, beautiful tree with branches reaching in every direction!

If you haven't trusted Jesus yet

All of this love starts with God's love for you. If you haven't trusted Jesus yet, you can today. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die for your sins and rise again. You can pray something like this:

Dear Jesus, thank You for loving me so much. I know I have sinned, and I'm sorry. I believe You died for me and rose again. I trust You as my Savior, and I want to follow You as my Lord. Fill me with Your love, so I can love others. Amen.

If you prayed that, tell a parent, a pastor or another Christian you trust. They'll want to celebrate with you!

What's next

A healthy tree does one more thing: it bears fruit that feeds others, year after year, season after season.

In **Book 6**, the last book of Rooted, you'll discover God's purpose for your life: the good works He has planned for you, the gifts and time He's given you, how to lead by serving, and how to finish well. And you'll look ahead to the day Jesus comes back and everything is made new.

Until then, keep your roots deep in God, and keep your branches reaching out in love.

> *"And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone else."*
> *— 1 Thessalonians 3:12 (BSB)*

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