

Day One - February 1, 2011

Bella and Ben were good friends. They also happened to be sister and brother. They had a lot of fun together most of the time. But their parents thought they argued too much! Sometimes their parents said they were like fuel and fire to each other. Bella and Ben knew they argued a lot, but they weren't too sure what fuel and fire meant. So they kept on arguing and their parents kept wanting them to stop.

One thing Ben and Bella could agree on was vacation. And they were looking forward to going camping for a whole week with their parents. Adding to the fun was a brand new trailer to camp in. It wasn't really "brand new", but since Ben and Bella had only camped in a tent, it was a very wonderful and new idea to them. One of their favorite things to do was talk about all they were going to do on vacation as they walked to school in the morning and when they were getting ready for bed at night.

So with thoughts full of camping dreams, the two children went to get ready for bed. For now, they were too busy imagining the trip to argue about anything at home. Before their dad turned out the light, he read a Bible verse he was memorizing and then each took a turn asking the Lord to watch over them through the night and help them to be faithful to God during the next day. They were also praying for a neighbor boy that was new to their country and was hard to understand when he talked to them. School wasn't very fun for him since he didn't know their language yet. Ben and Bella were both trying to be his friend.

Teeth brushed, homework finished, prayers prayed. It was time for rest, and sleep came quickly.

Questions to talk about:

- Have you ever memorized a Bible verse? Try to remember it now and say all you remember out loud.
- Do you know what verse the kids heard that night? Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Read it a couple of times. Let's try to memorize it like Ben and Bella's dad! For now, just the first phrase: **"For it is by grace you have been saved"**

Day Two - February 2, 2011

Ivan was the neighbor boy's name. He lived two houses down. Now that he was realizing Ben and Bella were really trying to understand him and be his friend, he wanted to be with them a lot. While Ben and Bella were still brushing their teeth, Ivan

arrived to walk to school with them. They hadn't ever had anyone come to their door before school! Mrs. Blake, Ben and Bella's mother invited a very nervous Ivan in to wait. Mrs. Blake seemed able to talk to anyone and soon Ivan was relaxing. Before the kids got their coats on, their mother always read a Bible verse and prayed with them asking the Lord to guide them all through the Holy Spirit's power.

Now Ben felt nervous, wondering what Ivan would think about praying to God and talking about the Holy Spirit.

Mrs. Blake didn't skip a beat. She read the verse, John 20:31 ["These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."](#) and then told Ivan they were going to talk to God before they did anything else. She explained that Jesus, God's Son was our Savior and she depended on His Spirit to guide each member of her family - every day! He nodded but Ben was sure Ivan had no idea what Mrs. Blake was talking about. He couldn't even understand their teacher at school!

They prayed together and left for school. They talked non-stop to Ivan about their planned vacation in the new trailer. He listened carefully, but didn't try to say too much.

Questions to talk about:

- Ben seemed uncomfortable about praying with Ivan. Have you ever felt uncomfortable praying with one of your school friends watching or listening?
- What does it mean to have the Spirit of God guide us through the day?

Oh, don't forget! We're memorizing [Ephesians 2:8-9](#). Yesterday we learned the first phrase, ["For it is by grace you have been saved"](#)

Say it a couple of times again and then add two words: [through faith](#).

["For it is by grace you have been saved - through faith"](#).

Day Three - February 3, 2011

Bella was pretty messy. Ben didn't like anything out of place. And, Ben also liked everything in the place he chose. Bella and Ben shared a bathroom. It was nice to have their own bathroom, but they also had to keep it clean. Bella kept it messy and Ben kept rearranging everything. Bella's messiness made Ben angry. Bella didn't like Ben moving her things. So they argued a lot in the mornings when they got ready for school. At night, they argued when it was time to get ready for bed. Tonight was no different. When Ben and Bella's father came to read to them and practice the verse they were all learning, he overheard a lot of angry words. Then, just as he was approaching the kid's bathroom, he heard a big crash.

Shards of glass were scattered all over the floor. The over-powering fragrance of too-much perfume in one place made them all start coughing. Bella began to cry. The perfume bottle broken at her feet was her treasure. Her grandmother had given it to her and she had placed it on the bathroom counter to enjoy its beautiful shape and color. Ben had been frustrated to find something left out on the bathroom counter. So they had begun to fight over it and before either of them realized it, the beautiful glass decanter slipped out of their hands and onto the floor.

Dad immediately began to pick up the glass. He asked Bella and Ben to stand very still while he gathered the shards of glass. He didn't want either one of them to get cut from the sharp edges. No one remembered the angry words or the fight for a few moments. Then when the glass was gathered, swept and finally wiped up carefully with damp paper towels, both children waited while their pajamas were inspected for tiny pieces of glass. Pieces were found on both Ben and Bella's feet. But, because of their dad's caution and care; no one got cut.

That night, as they crawled into bed, dad began to ask if they could remember the Bible verse so far. No one wanted to talk. Finally, Bella was able to say, "For it is by grace you were saved - by faith."

Then Ben said it too and their dad added one more phrase, "and this not from yourselves".

"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this not from yourselves".

Ben figured he was going to be in big trouble for fighting over the perfume bottle. So he braced himself for a lecture. He wouldn't have fought if Bella hadn't made a mess of their counter again. She always made so much extra work for him.

Bella thought she was in big trouble for fighting and shouting instead of working things out with her brother. But it was all his fault, so she had a good argument ready.

But instead, their dad simply prayed for them all. He asked the Lord to give them rest. He also thanked the Lord for Ben and for Bella and for their salvation. He prayed in Jesus' name and said "Amen".

Questions to talk about:

- The Bible verse this family is memorizing is the same one we're memorizing this week. Talk about what this verse is saying.
- Who saves us?
- How do we get faith?

- Where does it come from?

Say the verse one more time. You're doing great!

Day Four - February 4, 2011

The bathroom still smelled awfully strong. Ben thought it stunk, but he knew better than to pick a fight this morning. Bella still looked like she might either cry or attack him. They ate breakfast and listened half-heartedly while their mother read from the Bible before they left for school. Today she read [Mark 14:31](#), "But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

Ben and Bella both were thinking they couldn't understand how Peter could disown Jesus. That was the last thing they would ever do! They loved Jesus! He was their best friend! They were even more surprised when they heard their mom praying for the Lord to help each of them love each member of their own family like they loved Jesus.

Ben thought that was a silly thing to pray. He didn't love Bella like he loved Jesus! She was okay. I mean... She was his sister! And, he had to admit to himself while he was putting on his coat; most of the time he had more fun with Bella than anyone else. But she sure could make him mad!

Bella wasn't happy. She was angry with her mom and dad for not punishing Ben. He was the one that caused her perfume to break all over the floor. She could have been injured! There was no way to get that perfume back. But they hadn't punished Ben. They hadn't even scolded him and Bella was mad. She was also mad at Ben, but he was mad at her too, so she couldn't even argue with him right now. And on top of it all, her mom prayed for them to love each other like they loved Jesus! That was crazy! Bella would much rather share a bathroom with Jesus than Ben. Jesus wouldn't rearrange her stuff or complain about her messiness. After all, Jesus made her that way!

Ivan didn't show up to walk to school today, so they didn't have to talk. No one thought about their vacation. And by the time they got to school, they weren't thinking about their mom's prayer either. They were just mad.

Questions to talk about:

- The verse their mom read talked about Peter, one of Jesus' close friends. He said he would never betray Jesus. But we know that he did betray him and soon after, Jesus was crucified on the cross. If you haven't read that story, it's in Mark chapters 14 and 15.

- How can we love someone so much - like Peter did Jesus and still mess up so badly?
- How can we love people like we love Jesus?
- Is it even possible?

Don't forget! Ben and Bella are mad, but we're not! We're memorizing a verse in Ephesians! Do you remember where it's found? [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)

Yesterday we got this far, **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this not from yourselves”**.

Let's add one more phrase, [it is the gift of God](#).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Day Five - February 5, 2011

Ben loved Saturdays. There were always fun things to do together and he enjoyed being with his dad. Ben's dad worked long hours during the week, so Saturday was special to the whole family. Today they were working on the new trailer. It was new to them, but like I told you before; it wasn't really new. It had been in a storage building for a couple of years. So there was a lot of dirt and grime that had settled in to stay. Both Bella and Ben were helping clean the walls and the counters today. It was a lot of work, but it wasn't long before they were all laughing and imagining the fun they would have together in this trailer - in just a few weeks.

Then their dad stopped working for a minute and asked the kids how they would **keep** the trailer clean once they got it all clean the first time. They both said they would work at wiping their feet before they came in from outside, and they would help clean up some every day while they were on vacation. Dad mentioned they would need to clean the trailer like this every year! Before they could use it, they would have to clean the grime from the long winter months first. It would never stay clean by itself.

Bella didn't like to clean anything, and she knew the fun of washing the trailer this first time would wear off. Now she wasn't so sure she wanted a trailer. No one worried very much about the tent. And, it stayed just fine in its bag all winter waiting for the first camping trip of the spring. She didn't want to clean while she was on vacation. Even though she had just said she would a few minutes before.

She wished someone else would keep the trailer clean so she wouldn't have to.

Then dad said something else. He said the trailer was a little like their own hearts. They needed to keep their hearts clean too. Just like they wanted their camp trailer to

be ready for all of them to sleep and eat there, their hearts should be ready for Jesus. Ben and Bella weren't sure what he meant, but they both felt bad. They hadn't played together for a couple of days. They hadn't talked. They could hardly look at each other.

Questions to talk about:

- Why do you think Ben and Bella are feeling bad now?

What do you think would help?

- Bella said she wished they had someone to just keep their trailer clean so she wouldn't have to work so hard. Do you ever wish there was someone to help keep your heart clean? Or someone to help you keep from saying and doing things that make you feel bad?

John 14:16 says, I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you.

- Maybe Ben and Bella need the Holy Spirit to help them. What do you know about Him?

Then their dad asked them to play a game with him. He said he would say the first word of Ephesians 2:8-9 and then Ben would say the second and Bella the third. Then dad would say the fourth word, and so on. It sounded like work, but after they started, it was a lot of fun. They said the verse so many times, they were able to add the whole thing in. Why don't you try it? You might have fun too!

For - it - is - by - grace - you - have - been - saved, - through - faith—and - this - not - from - yourselves, - it - is - the - gift - of - God— not - by - works, - so - that - no - one - can - boast.

Don't forget to come to church tomorrow to get the next week of stories with Bella and Ben!