

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

Copyright © 2003 by Josh D. McDowell and Ed Stewart. All rights reserved.

The One Year is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Edited by Betty Free and Karin Stock Buursma

Cover design by Kirk DouPonce

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked "NKJV" are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible* copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked NCV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Century Version, copyright © 1987, 1988, 1991 by Word Publishing, Dallas, Texas 75039. Used by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Printed in the United States of America

09 08 07 06 05 04 03
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

C O N T E N T S

Introduction

January

- 1 No Way? No Way!
- 2 Like Father, Like Son
- 3 Ask for Something Outrageous
- 4 What a Way to Go!
- 5 Down in Lonesome Town
- 6 A Friend in Need
- 7 Bad Apples in the Barrel
- 8 To Find a Friend You Have to Be a Friend
- 9 Happy Re-Birthday to You!
- 10 Free at Last, I'm Free at Last
- 11 I'm Your Daddy Now
- 12 Just a Few More Hours
- 13 God, Please Help My Friend
- 14 The Biggest No-Brainer of Them All
- 15 Mobilizing a Rescue Operation
- 16 Get the Word Out
- 17 Call Yourself a Rescue Ranger
- 18 The Liberator
- 19 Breaking Down the Barriers
- 20 Tough Guy
- 21 The Nitty-Gritty Savior
- 22 What Color Is Your Jesus?
- 23 How Will You Know If You Don't Ask?
- 24 Becoming Best Buddies
- 25 The Friendship Killers
- 26 Fairly Good Friends Fight Fairly
- 27 A World of Friendship Opportunities
- 28 Friends in a World of Hurt
- 29 A People-Centered Focus
- 30 Busted for Taking a Day Off
- 31 Putting Your Life in His Hands

February

- 1 Sometimes I Feel So Lonely
- 2 You Don't Go through Tough Times Alone
- 3 When Friends Go Away
- 4 He Knows Just How You Feel
- 5 Fads and Facts about Faith
- 6 I Feel the Need for Seed
- 7 Something to Chew On
- 8 The One and Only
- 9 What's on Your Wish List?
- 10 Nice Guys Finish Last—But Not Always
- 11 You Have Friends in Weird Places
- 12 Know the Score about “Scoring”
- 13 Love Makes the World Go 'Round
- 14 What Kind of Love Are You Talking About?
- 15 When Love Is a One-Way Street
- 16 Loving When It Hurts
- 17 The *Right* Right and Wrong
- 18 Does God Grade on the Curve?
- 19 It's God's Way or the Highway
- 20 Getting to Know You
- 21 Don't Check Your Brains at the Door
- 22 Check Your I.D.
- 23 There's More to You than Meets the Eye
- 24 Big Person on Campus
- 25 Break Free from Those Flimsy Chains
- 26 Your Inner Self-Portrait
- 27 Death, Taxes, and Temptation
- 28 Someone to Watch Over Me
- 29 A Habit You Can Live With

March

- 1 What Part of Perfect Don't You Understand?
- 2 Here Comes the Judge
- 3 The Egg and I
- 4 Credit Check
- 5 Who's Right about Right and Wrong?
- 6 Self-Appointed Judges
- 7 How Do You Measure Truth?
- 8 Getting to the Bottom of the Rules
- 9 Whose Rules Will Rule?
- 10 Do Yourself a Favor and Love Yourself
- 11 Looking for a Pony
- 12 Guess What I Heard about You
- 13 Keep Blooming Where God Plants You
- 14 One Gigantic Sign from God
- 15 Can You Feel the Love?
- 16 God Wrote the Old Book on Love
- 17 God Wrote the New Book on Love
- 18 The Book of Love
- 19 The All-Time Right Thing to Do
- 20 A Love That Is More than Human
- 21 The Great Pretender
- 22 There's a Price on Your Head
- 23 Hey, You with the Fluorescent Orange Hair!
- 24 It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good He Is
- 25 A Day in the Life of Whoever
- 26 A Moment-by-Moment Friend
- 27 Dinner in a Time Machine
- 28 When the Pressure Is On
- 29 Are You or Aren't You?
- 30 100 Percent Faithful
- 31 A Reservation for Your Destination

April

- 1 A Family Affair
- 2 A Knight to Remember
- 3 Getting to Know Him
- 4 Is There an Elvis in Your Life?
- 5 He Became One of Us
- 6 Clues to the Big Surprise
- 7 Eyewitness Account
- 8 Whatever Happened to Easter?
- 9 It's a Matter of Life and Death—and Life!
- 10 Power Struggle
- 11 Does Love Make It Right?
- 12 What You Do for Love
- 13 God on Patrol
- 14 Getting Personal with “The Force”
- 15 This Machine Is Out of Order
- 16 Taking a Stand When You Would Rather Take a Seat
- 17 Finding the Road to Freedom
- 18 No Compromise
- 19 Deal with It and Keep Moving On
- 20 Living on the Edge
- 21 The Higher the Price, the Greater the Value
- 22 If You Were the Only One
- 23 Who Gets into Your World?
- 24 Forgive and Forget
- 25 A Safe Place for You
- 26 Being There When Your Friends Are Down
- 27 Be-Attitudes for Friends
- 28 Plugging In to the Power Source
- 29 The *Super* Superhero
- 30 Faith like a Hole in the Ceiling

May

- 1 Love and Hell Don't Mix, Do They?
- 2 Too Late for Another Chance
- 3 Bad Things Happen to Good People
- 4 Can We Blame God for Bad Things That Happen?
- 5 Bringing Out the Big Gun
- 6 How Is Your Prayer Confidence?
- 7 When Prayer Needs a Voice
- 8 Brain Transplant
- 9 A Body in Need Is a Body Indeed
- 10 The Thrill of Second Place
- 11 Hurting with Those in a World of Hurt
- 12 It's Payback Time
- 13 Have I Died Yet Today?
- 14 He Just Keeps Loving and Loving and Loving You
- 15 It's an Honor to Serve Him
- 16 Who's That Looking Back at You?
- 17 Move over, Mona Lisa
- 18 The Spirit of the Matter
- 19 The Only Way to Go
- 20 Are You Power-Packed?
- 21 It's Not You, but What God Can Do through You
- 22 Potted Plants Can't Answer Prayer
- 23 Is Elmer Gantry Alive and Well?
- 24 Never Believe a Snake in the Grass
- 25 Hey, I Don't Deserve This!
- 26 Telling What You Know
- 27 On the Outside Looking In
- 28 The Walking Dead
- 29 One of God's Great Gifts
- 30 Where Do You Draw the Line?
- 31 Fire in the Eyes

June

- 1 Jury Duty
- 2 Stick with the Game Plan
- 3 The Driver's Instruction Manual
- 4 Which Way Is Up When You're Down?
- 5 Read All about It
- 6 Love That Touches Your Heart
- 7 I Love You—Period!
- 8 Wrong Way!
- 9 You're Accepted, Not an Exception
- 10 Dad Really Loves Me
- 11 No Longer an Island
- 12 What's the Latitude of Your Dating Attitude?
- 13 Staying within the Lines
- 14 It's All about Character
- 15 Do You Have That Loving Feeling?
- 16 Who's Keeping Score?
- 17 You Want Me to Build *What*?
- 18 Love Lasts Longer than Ice-Cream Sandwiches
- 19 The Bad News Makes the Good News Even Better
- 20 A Personal Invitation
- 21 Building Bridges
- 22 Blend with Your Non-Christian Friend
- 23 Dead and Alive
- 24 There's Plenty of Room in the Tomb
- 25 Hide-and-Seek
- 26 Have a Heart
- 27 Time Out
- 28 Lending a Hand
- 29 A Supportive Attitude
- 30 Guess Who You Are Really Supporting

July

- 1 Busted by Jesus!
- 2 Do IOU?
- 3 Love Is Always Right
- 4 What's the Difference?
- 5 Time's Up
- 6 Family Feud
- 7 Home Is Where He Is
- 8 Why Did My Friend Go Away?
- 9 Turning Losses into Gains
- 10 Who Will Be Your Everything?
- 11 Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
- 12 Are You Looking to the Media or the Master?
- 13 Image Is Everything
- 14 Who Told You Who You Are?
- 15 Is There a Way to God's Will?
- 16 Finding God's Will Is an Attitude Issue
- 17 God's Will on Two Levels
- 18 First Things First
- 19 God's Will, Your Desires—They Fit
- 20 Love without Strings
- 21 You Don't Have to Be a Doormat
- 22 Please Help Me; I'm Falling
- 23 What the World Needs Is Love, God's Love
- 24 Putting On a Show
- 25 Mountaintop High
- 26 I Believe—Kind Of
- 27 The Faith Factor
- 28 Serving God Hands Down
- 29 The Dating Game
- 30 Your Route of Escape
- 31 Good Reasons to Wait

August

- 1 Call Them "The Ten Freedoms"
- 2 It Sure Feels like Love
- 3 The Human Solution
- 4 Make Sure You Have the Basic Equipment
- 5 I Love Your Book! May I Have Your Autograph?
- 6 There'll Be Some Changes Made
- 7 No Pain, No Gain
- 8 Make Yourself at Home
- 9 Yesterday, Today, and Forever
- 10 The Jesus Question
- 11 Those Who Knew Him Best
- 12 He Is Who He Says He Is
- 13 Guilty Because of Who He Is
- 14 Plant Yourself Where the Truth about You Flourishes
- 15 Hanging Out with a Helpful Crowd
- 16 Seeing Yourself with 20/20 Vision
- 17 Getting a Clear Picture Step by Step
- 18 Putting In a Good Word
- 19 Tell It Like It Is
- 20 Are You on Target?
- 21 Helping Babies Grow Up
- 22 Helping New Christians Get a Good Start
- 23 The Christian's No-Brainer
- 24 Taking Your Love in Two Directions
- 25 Whom Should I Love More?
- 26 When Authorities Clash
- 27 Levels of Love
- 28 The Oil of Relationships
- 29 Not Getting What We Deserve
- 30 Sundown Is Coming
- 31 Phony Forgiveness

September

- 1 Chasing the Wind
- 2 The Basics of Avoiding Boredom
- 3 When You Want to Disappear
- 4 The Gift That Keeps On Giving
- 5 An Inside Job
- 6 Taking Your Spiritual Vitamins
- 7 Rest in His Peace
- 8 Who's Number One?
- 9 It's What's Inside That Counts
- 10 "Everybody" Isn't Always
Everybody
- 11 Sex Isn't a Dirty Word
- 12 Loving the Person in the Mirror
- 13 Looking Out for Number One
- 14 Don't Overdo It or Underdo It
- 15 How Can Anyone Love a Mess like
This?
- 16 One-Sided Friendships
- 17 Talking Deep
- 18 Who Are You Hanging With?
- 19 Super Friend
- 20 How to Break Out of Loneliness
- 21 Laying Down the Law about Love
- 22 Which Testament Is Number One?
- 23 So Are We under Grace or Not?
- 24 Tough Questions about the Law and
Love
- 25 Up Close and Personal
- 26 No Lie
- 27 Can the Garbage
- 28 Going One-on-One with Sexual
Curiosity
- 29 X-Rated Scenes on the Brain
- 30 Taking Control

October

- 1 A Lifetime Commitment
- 2 Commissioned 110
Percent
- 3 Do the Math
- 4 After God Made You, He Broke
the Mold
- 5 Specially Equipped
- 6 More Love than You Can Handle
- 7 Is the Holy Bible Holy?
- 8 Fully Fact or Fanciful Fiction?
- 9 Details, Details, Details
- 10 A Life Worth Watching
- 11 More than Enough Love to Go
Around: Part 1
- 12 More than Enough Love to Go
Around: Part 2
- 13 Tapping Into the Power of Love
- 14 Blindsided by Death
- 15 Working Your Way through the
Pain
- 16 Help to Make It Through
- 17 Down but Not Out
- 18 Rolling with the Punches
- 19 Turn to the One Who
Understands
- 20 The Wisdom of "Foolish" Words
- 21 Take It Away, Jesus
- 22 The Futility of Hoop-Jumping
- 23 Being the Right Kind of Friend
- 24 A Standard for Friendship
- 25 Divorce Is a Dirty Word
- 26 God's Version of Superglue
- 27 Save Yourself for More than Sex
- 28 The Spirit of Sex
- 29 Locker Room 101
- 30 Claim It and Enjoy It!
- 31 Are You Sure You're Sure?

November

- 1 Close Your Eyes to Blind Faith
- 2 Believing Isn't Rocket Science
- 3 Stewed Tomatoes and Tennis Shoes
- 4 Poor Doubting Thomas
- 5 What's on Your Price Tag?
- 6 Switch On the Light
- 7 Who's Blocking the Light?
- 8 For Such a Worm As I
- 9 Turn On the Love Light
- 10 Is Anybody Interested in Me?
- 11 You Can Do It
- 12 Howdy, Neighbor
- 13 All in the Family
- 14 Let the Love Flow Out
- 15 Both Soup and Salvation
- 16 When Sin Gets in the Way
- 17 Thinking about the End
- 18 Turning the Dark Clouds Away
- 19 Everybody Is a Priceless Treasure
- 20 Upward Mobility
- 21 Mercy, Mercy
- 22 Give Till It Helps
- 23 My Tribute
- 24 Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?
- 25 Eyewitness News
- 26 You Can't Get Around the Empty Tomb
- 27 To the Death
- 28 Is It Good for You?
- 29 Out with Bad Thoughts, in with Good Thoughts
- 30 A Way Out

December

- 1 How to Get There from Here
- 2 Finding Your Way One Step at a Time
- 3 Don't Ever Buy a Compass That Points South
- 4 Getting the Word on Tough Choices
- 5 Rare Book
- 6 Are You Bowing under the Pressure?
- 7 Coming On Strong
- 8 Under Control or Out of Control?
- 9 How to Turn to the Right
- 10 Trapped in the Middle
- 11 Getting Back on Track
- 12 Tapping Into Your Power Source
- 13 Fill 'Er Up at the Soda Fountain
- 14 Filling Up the Train to Heaven
- 15 Excuses, Excuses, Excuses!
- 16 For Goodness' Sake
- 17 What's Love Got to Do with It?
- 18 Don't Settle for Anything Less
- 19 The Temple of Love
- 20 No Strings Attached
- 21 The Right Stuff
- 22 Wise Investing
- 23 What's So Funny about Money?
- 24 Nativity Trivia
- 25 Peace on Earth!
- 26 The Gifts That Really Count
- 27 Why Pray When You Can Worry?
- 28 Time to Settle In
- 29 "I Want to Be like Mike"
- 30 "If It Weren't for Emily . . ."
- 31 What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?

HERE'S A DEEP QUESTION: Can you imagine anything ever happening in your life that would rattle your trust in God? Or would you ever swap your Christian faith for another belief—a belief you think makes more sense or works better in your life?

God wants to make your faith in him unshakable. He wants you to understand the undeniable reasons your beliefs are worth hanging on to. Sure, Christianity promises you eternity in heaven with God. But it also provides you with a relationship with the God who holds you tight right here and right now. No matter what you face, you're never alone. When you belong to God, you've got a solid rock now and forever.

In *Josh McDowell's One Year Book of Youth Devotions 2*, you'll come face-to-face with the truths all of us need to keep from “forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth” (Ephesians 4:14). You'll be convinced that your faith is true. And you'll know why your faith matters for every moment of your life.

Each page of this book brings you a short Bible reading, a key verse, a brief prayer, and a few questions or suggestions to help you apply the truth of that day's reading. You'll take quizzes and read stories. You'll get true-life accounts and fiction—and some selections that are stranger than fiction. You might laugh or cry. You'll need to think, but nothing will bust your brain, because the goal of each daily adventure is to understand the “God who is passionate about his relationship with you” (Exodus 34:14).

As you use *Josh McDowell's One Year Book of Youth Devotions 2* on your own, you can also go through *Josh McDowell's One Year Book of Family Devotions 2* with your family. And you can look for many other “Beyond Belief” resources.

No Way? No Way!

Bible Reading: John 14:6-7

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:6

YOU'VE MADE UP your mind. Instead of splitting your summer between lazing on the beach and scraping together odd chores to make money, you want an adventure. You want to go where none of your friends has gone before. You want to visit your cousin.

The attraction—and the problem: Your cousin lives on the other side of the planet in Borneo, where his scientist parents study insects. You don't know how to get there or where to find him. So you ask around.

You get all kinds of advice, but not all the responses you hear are helpful:

“Go to China and turn south for a few thousand miles. Lotsa luck.”

“Take the Bornean Flying Cockroach Airline.”

“Your cousin and his family must have misplaced their brains—and it sounds like it runs in the family.”

But finally your search pays off. “Borneo? You want to get to Borneo? I was born and raised in Borneo!” a professor at a nearby college tells you proudly. “And I'm headed back there for the summer. I know your cousin, and I'll be happy to take you right to him.”

Suppose you were actually hunting for a far-off cousin. Which bit of advice would help you most? It's no contest! You want to link up with someone who not only knows where you are going and how to get there but also knows your cousin and precisely how to find him.

You might never attempt an adventure to a hard-to-find location. But if you're a Christian, you are already on an all-important adventure. God the Father has invited you to come to him. James says, “Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you” (4:8). The Father invites you to enjoy a close relationship with him right now. Your life's destination, in fact, is *God*. He's the one you want to find.

But how do you get to him? Who can show you the way? Can you get to God without Jesus? No way. Not even close. Without Christ you can't get there from here, because to know the Father, you have to know the Son. To love the Father, you have to love Jesus Christ. To serve the Father, you have to serve Christ.

Jesus doesn't just *show* the way to the Father; he *is* the way! He's not a road map; he's the road. And he welcomes you to come through him to the loving Father.



REFLECT: How does it feel knowing that Jesus cares enough about you that he came to lead you to the Father?



PRAY: *God, thanks that I don't have to stumble through life to find you. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to show me the way to yourself.*

2 Like Father, Like Son

Bible Reading: John 14:8-11

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! John 14:9

HOW WOULD YOU feel if someone said to you, “You’re so much like your dad!”? It all depends on what your dad is like, right? If Dad has movie-star looks and Nobel prize-winning brains, you might pat yourself on the back because people think you’re like him. But if he’s like most dads—wiry hairs sprouting from his ears—you might hope you’re *not* like him, at least not in *that* way.

So just how similar are you and your father? Check (✓) any statements below that describe how you are alike. (If you prefer, compare yourself to your mother, older sibling, or another relative.) Do you have . . .

- the same eye color?
- the same hair color?
- the same body type and facial features?
- the same basic personality traits?
- the same musical and artistic talents—or lack thereof?
- the same spiritual goals in life?
- the same wiry hairs growing out of your ears?
- the same taste in TV, movies, and music?
- the same food likes and dislikes?
- the same sense of humor?

If you resemble your father closely enough, even people who don’t know him will get a good idea of what he is like by looking at you.

If you asked Jesus if he was a lot like his Father, he would answer, “Absolutely!” Jesus not only is your way to *get* to his Father, he also is your way to *know* what God the Father is like. Jesus is “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). So the more you know about what Jesus said and did, the more you know about God. When you see Christ’s compassion for people, for example, you know God is compassionate. Or when you read Christ’s words of truth, you know God is truth. God the Father wants you to know him.

You might not show a striking, obvious resemblance to how your dad looks or acts or talks. But Jesus shows you exactly what God is like. Get to know the Son, and you get to know the Father.



REFLECT: What do you know about God because you have seen it in Jesus? What do you see in Jesus that attracts you to God?



PRAY: *God, you could have hidden yourself and made it tough to get to know you. I’m grateful that Jesus shows me what you are like.*

3 Ask for Something Outrageous

Bible Reading: John 14:12-14

You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. John 14:13

DERRICK GLANCES across the cafeteria to where a girl sits with her friends. *Dear God*, he prays silently, *let me go out with her and I'll witness to her so much she'll for sure want to become a Christian.*

Natalie lays her hand on the exam paper she has just completed. Closing her eyes, she prays without moving her lips. *God, I don't expect a perfect paper. But please make enough answers right to get me a B.*

What's the most outrageous thing you have ever asked God for? That a twenty-pound sack of money would spill at your feet? That the pimple growing like a third eye in the middle of your forehead would disappear by morning? That your parents would slip you a Ferrari for graduation—or sooner?

Jesus said we can ask him for anything. That's right, he said *anything!* John 14:13 says he had a good reason to extend this invitation. Jesus—our only way to the Father and our only way to know what the Father is like—also wants to teach us to show off God's greatness. Here's the formula:

Your prayer for anything in Christ's name
 + Christ's perfect answer to your prayer
 = Glory to the Father.

When we pray *in Christ's name*, we are asking for our requests to be fulfilled *in Christ's will*. Since Jesus knows how to bring glory to God, he will answer our prayers in his best way so that God receives the glory he deserves.

So even though you might ask Jesus to miraculously change the answers on your exam, he knows you could grow more and bring greater glory to God by trusting him as you study. The result? Your prayer helps you recognize that God will help you when you study!

Jesus himself asked his Father for something outrageous, wondering aloud if he could avoid going to the cross. But he quickly added to his request, "Yet I want your will, not mine" (Matthew 26:39). Skipping the cross was not the Father's will, for he wanted salvation for us.

So go ahead—ask for anything. But ask in Christ's name. If you don't get the exact *anything* you pray for, it's because Christ knows a better way to give God glory.



REFLECT: Is there anything that stands in the way of your wanting to bring glory to God?



PRAY: *God, it's a privilege to ask for what I want—and to know you will answer my prayers in ways that change me for the better and give glory to you.*

4 What a Way to Go!

Bible Reading: John 14:1-4

I am going to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. John 14:2-3

WHERE'S YOUR HOME? Finger? Eyebrow? Coldfoot? (Those are real towns in Tennessee, Saskatchewan, and Alaska.) But a Christian's better-than-Worms hometown is only a temporary residence. (Worms is in Nebraska.) It's not temporary because you can't wait to get out of Boring (in Oregon), but because Christ is preparing a permanent home in heaven. Paul said, "We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior" (Philippians 3:20).

Way back in the dark days, Christian youth groups used to gather around a large, floor-mounted acoustic instrument called a "piano" and sing a peppy little chorus about our other "home":

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through;
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from heaven's distant shore;
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Where is "heaven's distant shore"? And how do you get there?

Once again Jesus Christ steps in to show you the way. Jesus is the way to the Father. He's the way to know what the Father is like. And he's the way to bring glory to the Father as you pray in his name. But after all this, he won't leave you stuck in this place where at times you "can't feel at home." He won't abandon you with no hope of finding your way to heaven. When his time is right for you—either when he returns or the moment you die, whichever comes first—Jesus promises to take you to where he is. He's your way to go home.

Do you realize that Jesus couldn't show you how to get home if he hadn't come down to earth? See, you need more than a *map* to find your way to God. You even need more than somebody to *tell* you the way. You need somebody to *meet* you where you are. Jesus finds you and takes you to where you need to be. The Son of God left his home in heaven and came into your world to show you the way home. And he came looking for you because he loves you.



REFLECT: Since Jesus came all this way, doesn't it make sense to follow him to that heavenly home?



PRAY: *Jesus, I want to make your way my way. I want to follow you—through life, to heaven.*

5 Down in Lonesome Town

Bible Reading: John 15:9-16

The greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. John 15:13

“I DON’T KNOW what my problem is,” Tamara blurts through tears. “I have friends. It’s not like I ever have to sit alone. But I still feel lonely in a crowd. I’m not sure anyone understands me—or wants to. Even my teachers. I think I could die and nobody would even notice I’d left.”

Making it through middle school or high school minus feelings of loneliness is like darting through cold season without getting a runny nose. Sooner or later you’re probably going to feel like a giant drip.

Like a runny nose, lonely feelings tell you something is amuck. Loneliness might seem like it’s about popularity or looks. It’s actually more about a God-given desire to be loved and accepted. That’s a deep, healthy need everyone has. When that need goes unmet, you feel lonely.

Most folks try to get rid of loneliness in one of a couple ways.

Approach #1: Act like a worm by crawling away from the crowds. Here’s how worms think: “I’m lonely because nobody loves me. Nobody loves me because I’m not lovable. The safest thing I can do is burrow underground. I’m never going to get close to others.” The worm approach pushes you even further from people.

Approach #2: Act like a puppy by doing anything to get people to like you. Puppies think, “I’m lonely because nobody loves me. Nobody loves me because I’m not trying hard enough. I’m going to get the attention of others, even if I make a fool of myself or go against my standards.” The puppy approach pushes you to do things you later regret.

Here’s a better plan for dealing with loneliness: *Act like the child of God that you are.* Feeling loved and accepted starts with your relationship with Christ, who is the only one able to meet the deepest needs of your life. Talking to Jesus and reading his Word—the Bible—are steps to strengthening your friendship with him. He laid down his life for you, so it’s obvious that *he* regards you as a friend worth dying for (see John 15:13). That’s powerful comfort when you wonder if anyone cares.

God, of course, wants to help you behave better than a worm or a puppy dog—more on that later. But your first step to crawling out of loneliness is to get close to the God who wants to be your best friend.



REFLECT: Like any true friend, Jesus is ready to hear your concerns about loneliness and friendship. So when in your life have you felt loneliness?



PRAY: Take a few minutes to tell God about times you feel lonely.

6 A Friend in Need

Bible Reading: Proverbs 17:17

*A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.
Proverbs 17:17*

“A FRIEND knows you totally and likes you anyway.”

“A friend is always there for you.”

“A friend loans you money and doesn’t bug you to get it back.”

“A friend knows how you’re feeling just by looking at you.”

So how would *you* describe a “friend”? You might say, “Anyone I know.” Or “Only those I can share my secrets and feelings with.” Huge difference? That’s because there are different levels of friendship.

Casual friendship is the first level. Casual friends are your next-locker neighbors, other classmates, neighbors you chat with but don’t know well, and perhaps many of your teachers. (You wouldn’t call all of them enemies, would you?) Anyone you talk with qualifies as a casual friend.

Close friends are the second level of friendship. Your close friends include people you eat lunch with, the ones you choose to sit by in class, and the ones you want time with on weekends.

Committed friends take you to a much deeper level of friendship. These are people you allow to see the real you. You trust them with your secrets, hurts, and joys. Most people have a group of casual friends, fewer close friends, and just a handful of committed friends.

If you have lots of casual friendships but come up short on committed friendships, you’ll feel lonely. Only on that third and deepest level of friendship are your needs for love and acceptance truly met. It’s committed friends who take away your loneliness.

Some days you want to go into worm mode and inch away from *everyone*. But if you get close to an inner circle of a few trusted friends, you find those friends comfort, counsel, and challenge you. When you hurt, your committed friends might not know what to say, but just being there for you helps. When you have to make a decision, friends let you bounce ideas around. Sometimes their advice doesn’t really help, but just having them around gives you confidence that everything will work out.

And when there’s something in your life that needs to be changed—a bad attitude, a harmful habit, or a risky behavior—committed friends lovingly push you toward doing what you know is right.



REFLECT: Good friends can impact your life in countless ways, so it’s vital you choose your friends wisely. What friendships are you willing to work hard at today?



PRAY: Ask God today to guide you to a few trustworthy friends.

Bad Apples in the Barrel

Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 3:2-5

Bad company corrupts good morals. 1 Corinthians 15:33, NASB

“MY PARENTS are always ripping into my friends,” Hailey burned. “They say I shouldn’t hang out with ‘those kind of people.’ I know my friends aren’t perfect. But plenty of my parents’ friends are a mess—and they still get together. It’s like my dad and mom think I’m a four-year-old.”

Ever had your parents clamp on you because of people you chum with?

Here’s what is likely happening. Parents don’t just look at what your friends are like right now. They try hard to peer into your future. And sometimes they see that someone you’re close to is steering into a ditch and may cause you to crash and burn (see 1 Corinthians 15:33).

Being smart in how you choose your friends goes a long way toward keeping your parents happy. It also helps make you the person God wants you to be because close friends have incredible influence on you.

How can you tell a good friend from one who might run you off God’s road? One sure way: Notice how friends alter your behavior. Let’s assume you are a sweet, kind, obedient, thoughtful, responsible, even angelic person. Suppose you find a new friend, and after a few weeks or months of hanging out with that person you’re blowing off school or mouthing off at home. What happened? You might feel your new friend is just helping you lighten up. But “friends” who negatively affect your behavior are not good for you no matter how much fun you have together.

You can befriend people who get into trouble, as long as you are a positive influence on them. Jesus was known as a friend to sinners (see Matthew 11:19). But he never let their attitudes or actions pull him in the wrong direction.

When someone starts steering you away from God, it’s time to back off from that friendship. That’s tough—but not as tough in the long run as continuing in a relationship that hurts you. You can explain: “You know, my commitment to Jesus Christ is really important to me, and I don’t want to disappoint him anymore by doing the things I’ve been doing. If you want to do those things without me, that’s up to you. But I can’t join you anymore. I would like you to get closer to God with me. If you would like to get closer to God with me, that would be great. What do you think?”



REFLECT: When have you had a friend who influenced you in the wrong direction? Do you have friendships you need to reconsider right now?



PRAY: Talk to God about your questionable friendships today—and ask him what to do about them.