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## INTRODUCTION

# ARE YOU READY FOR A LIFETIME OF ADVENTURE?

Jesus was a man of adventure—a true pioneer who fought and taught bravely. He was a man to follow and to become more like.

When Jesus spoke, people listened, whether they agreed with his teachings or not. How did he capture their attention? With stories called *parables*.

The fact that I have been to the shores of the Sea of Galilee helps me see the situation: Long, rolling hills edge the far horizon. Wind ripples the water, then the tall grass. There is the peace of nature's quiet. And near Capernaum where Jesus often taught, there is a place where the slope forms a perfect amphitheater.

Jesus would have stood at the base of the slope, with hundreds of people sitting in half circles that spread up the hill. His voice would have carried above the breeze to reach each of them clearly.

When I picture Jesus sharing his parables, my imagination is drawn to his audience. These were hungry people—not only physically, but spiritually. They traveled by foot for miles to hear him. Many were in poor health, their bodies weakened by years of hard work. Most didn't have much schooling. Hardly any could read.

How long would the people have sat if Jesus had spoken in words beyond their understanding? How long if he had not drawn them in so much that they forgot their aching muscles, tired bones, and grumbling stomachs? How long would they have remained if he had begun to lecture them

until they began to squirm? How long if he had preached at them like their synagogue teachers did, burdening them with hundreds of rules?

Jesus knew the best way to reach his audience was through stories. The stories he told were powerful, often with unexpected twists. And, perhaps surprisingly, his stories rarely mentioned God or religion, yet they pointed out important truths. The lessons were “caught,” not “taught,” and they gave his listeners something to discuss with each other long after Jesus had left their area.

I understand the power of story. It is my prayer that the stories in this devotional will help readers today. The stories are set in situations that today’s kids will find similar to their own circumstances. I hope parents will enjoy reading them aloud. Each story emphasizes a scriptural passage and is followed by thoughts and questions on the meaning of the story as it relates to that Scripture.

Each five-day week begins with an adventure story. Focusing on one theme from that story and three subtopics, the rest of the week is filled with in-depth questions, Scriptures, and prayers—even questions for kids to ask adults! Each week ends with creative application ideas.

Whether you are reading the 15 weeks of stories and daily devotional material as a family, as a small group, or on your own, I hope you will discover a sense of adventure that binds you to God. Knowing God and growing in faith are lifetime adventures. Enjoy the journey!

# WEEK 1

**WHAT'S UP THIS WEEK:**  
**Treating Others with  
Respect**

**THEME VERSES FOR THE WEEK:**  
**Mark 12:29-31**

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."



*Mike and Jimmy challenged the other kids to jump their bikes into the lake, but the two of them were the ones who ended up all wet. Find out what happens when a little less than total honesty, a couple of practical jokes gone wrong, and a bit too much bragging combine for a wild ride.*

## Wild Ride

Under a blue sky on the hottest day of the summer, only three of us remained at the top of the hill sitting on our mountain bikes.

On one side of me sat a girl who had just moved to town. A little way off, my best friend, Jimmy Evans, prepared to zoom down the steep slope.

Jimmy was far enough away that I could whisper to the girl, Suzy Wallace.

"You know what?" I said softly. "Last night I snuck into Jimmy's garage and loosened the pedals on his bike. He doesn't have a chance!"

"I thought he was your best friend," she whispered back.

"He is," I said. "Best friends since first grade."

Jimmy had no idea what we were



talking about. He grinned at me and yelled, "Ready, Mr. Loser?"

I looked down the bike path that headed straight toward the lake. A crowd of kids waited for the three of us to jump in the first annual Daredevil Mountain Bike Jumping Contest.

"Me? Mr. Loser?" I said to him. "The name's Mike Roberts, king of daredevils. You might remember that my practice jump yesterday cleared yours by half a mile."

Ever since we were little, Jimmy and I have competed against each other. Not in a bad way, like trying to hurt each other. But afterwards we like to brag. Anything we play—baseball, football, soccer—we always try to do better than the other guy.

Jimmy is tall and skinny, like me. People sometimes think we're brothers, because we both have the same reddish-blond hair . . . and maybe because we argue like brothers. Not in a bad way, though, because we really are friends.

"Ha ha. Half a mile if you measure backward," Jimmy shot back. "How 'bout the loser cuts the winner's lawn for the rest of the summer?"

I laughed. He, of course, didn't know why. Those pedals were going to come off as soon as he stepped down hard enough to get any speed.

"You got a deal," I said. "And Suzy's a witness. Right, Suzy?"

"Sure," she said. "But can I get in on this deal too?"

Her question surprised us both.

"You guys aren't afraid of a girl beating you, are you?"

"No," I said quickly.

"No way," Jimmy added. "This whole contest was our idea."



It was. We'd come up with the Daredevil Mountain Bike Jumping Contest because summers in Greenville are so boring.

I must admit, it was a good idea. A professional stunt rider lives in our town, and he built a ramp next to the lake to practice his bike tricks. The water's not deep enough that you could lose a bike, and it isn't so shallow that a person could get hurt jumping into it.

We asked his permission to use the ramp, then we told all our friends. The idea was to ride down the hill as fast as possible, shoot off the ramp, and jump out over the lake as far as you could.

Kids were allowed to practice all week; then on Saturday we had started with 15 of us at the top of the hill.

The view was great. Our town reflected in the water on the other side of the lake. Rolling hills spread off as far as you could see. But nobody was looking at the scenery, because we were all too nervous.

At the base of the hill, my sister and Jimmy's sister held video cameras to tape the jumps, in case anybody disagreed on who had jumped the highest and the farthest. Even our parents came, just in case somebody got hurt.

We'd watched the first 12 jumpers go. Seeing kids hit the ramp full speed on their mountain bikes and vault into the air was great. Some held on to the handlebars as they hit the water. Others jumped off their bikes for superbig splashdowns.



"So what's your offer?" Jimmy asked Suzy.

"If I don't beat both of your jumps," she said, "I'll cut both your lawns all summer."

"And if you somehow actually manage to beat us?" Jimmy asked.

"You visit me and my dad every Sunday morning for the rest of the summer."

"Huh?" Jimmy asked. "Your dad?"

"He's a minister. You guys will have to come to church."

"We don't need preaching," Jimmy said.

"Afraid?" She smiled and laughed.

"You're on," he said.

"You're on," I said.

Jimmy waved and pushed off.

I held my breath.

He's a great athlete. His legs are stronger than mine, and he's very coordinated. That's why he had a good chance of winning—except for those bike pedals.

A third of the way down, he pushed so hard that both pedals came off. He was standing as he pedaled, and he slammed down hard on the bike's crossbar. He barely kept his balance as he hit the ramp, but I could tell he was in pain by the way he fell over sideways in the air. Altogether, Jimmy cleared only five feet.

Before he got out of the water, I busted a gut laughing. Even from the top of the hill, I could hear his groans of pain.

"Mike Roberts, you dog!" he shouted. "I know it was you who did that!"

"Best friends, huh?" Suzy said.

"Sure," I grinned. "Such good friends that I'll beat you on this jump—and you can cut my lawn instead of him doing it."

She smiled. "Go for it."

"I will."

I got ready. From my practice runs, I knew how much fun this was going to be.

The key was to start fast and hard. There were no bumps to worry about on the way down. You could hit the ramp at full speed. As long as you dipped at the knees just before takeoff and kept your balance in the air, it was a breeze. Landing was fun too. The water really cooled you off.

"Well?" she said. "I'm waiting."

"Psyching myself up," I explained. "With Jimmy out of the way, I've got a real good shot at winning."

"Sure," she said with that smile.

I should have suspected something. But I was too dumb.

Standing, I slammed my feet down on the pedals as hard as I could. And halfway down, my bicycle chain snapped.

On the video Jimmy and I saw later, I looked exactly like he had. I fell hard on my bike seat, managed to keep my balance, hit the ramp and flew a few feet into the air. And, like Jimmy, I simply fell over sideways in a big whale splash.

I groaned as I came up for air. Only one person would have done this to me.

"Jimmy," I croaked. "I'll get you for this."

I dragged myself and my bike out of the water. But I was in too much pain to do much else as I flopped down beside Jimmy.

I groaned.

He groaned.

At the top of the hill, Suzy waved at both of us. She pushed off on her mountain bike, flashed down the hill, hit the ramp perfectly, and cleared enough air to easily win the contest.

"Remember," she said with that smile of hers. "See you Sunday morning."

"Yeah," Jimmy said.

"Yeah," I said.

As we watched her ride away, Jimmy groaned again. “You know,” he said, “it was dumb of me to tell her ahead of time how I had fixed your chain to break halfway down the hill.”

I shook my head. “Tell me about it.”

We dragged ourselves home.

And Sunday morning?

Her father greeted us at the church and showed us to our seats.

You’d almost think Suzy had told him the whole story, because his sermon was about treating others with respect.

### **WHAT’S UP THIS WEEK?**

Okay, so Mike and Jimmy didn’t treat each other well. The big question now is, What did they do wrong? As this week continues, here’s what we’ll look at more closely:

- Honesty
- Bragging
- Taking Advantage of Others

### **PRAYER POWER**

It’s time to talk to God! Think about the story, and ask God to show you what he wants you to learn from it this week. The Holy Spirit will point out the truths he has for you, and he’ll help you understand his ways.

## HONESTY

You may have picked up on several ways that Mike and Jimmy weren't respectful of each other. Let's focus on honesty today.

### BRAIN STRETCHERS

#### FOR KIDS:

1. What did you first think when you read about Mike's plan to trick Jimmy? Maybe you thought it was funny, or maybe you thought it was mean and saw a bad outcome from the beginning.
2. It's true: Practical jokes can be hilarious. But in what ways did Mike and Jimmy go too far in tricking each other?
3. How could the results of their trickery have been even more serious than they were?

#### ASK AN ADULT:

1. Was there ever a time when you took advantage of someone or felt taken advantage of? What were the results? a hurt relationship? guilty feelings?

## SCRIPTURE POWER

Mike and Jimmy weren't respectful of each other; instead, they were dishonest. The Bible tells us how God feels about honesty and dishonesty:

*The Lord hates cheating, but he delights in honesty.  
(Proverbs 11:1)*

"But I was just joking!" How many times have you heard someone say that? Yeah, we've all probably said it ourselves at one time or another. Of course, not all jokes are bad. But it's important to double check how someone else can be hurt. Both Mike and Jimmy could have wound up with more than just bruised limbs and egos.

Treachery and dishonesty are things that the Lord hates! The world has made these things an acceptable part of daily life, but those who love God are supposed to be different from the rest of the world! Change in our lives begins by first recognizing God's heart. By spending time with him, we can grow and become more like him.

*Show respect for everyone. (1 Peter 2:17)*

Part of showing respect for everyone is respecting their trust in you. In other words, friends take a chance on trusting you to be honest. You don't want to mess with that! It can take a long time to earn back someone's trust after it's been broken.

## PRAYER POWER

As you pray today, ask God to help you recognize the differences between being *almost* honest and being *truly* honest. It's often tough to recognize these differences! But if you ask him, God will develop the characteristic of honesty in you.

## BRAGGING

Yesterday we discussed how honesty is part of treating others with respect. Today let's find out some things about controlling our words, particularly when it comes to bragging.

### BRAIN STRETCHERS

#### FOR KIDS:

1. In "Wild Ride," can you tell what Suzy thought of Mike's and Jimmy's bragging about their plans to trick each other?
2. Why do you think that led her to help them change their focus?

#### ASK AN ADULT:

1. How can you tell the difference between a practical joke and trickery that goes too far?
2. Do you know anyone who brags a lot? Does that characteristic affect your opinion of him or her?

### SCRIPTURE POWER

*You call yourself a hero, do you?  
Why boast about this crime of yours,  
you who have disgraced God's  
people? All day long you plot*



*destruction. Your tongue cuts like a sharp razor; you're an expert at telling lies. (Psalm 52:1-2)*

Bragging is bad, and bragging about evil is even worse. In this passage the tongue is compared to a razor, a tool designed for cutting. We must make a choice about how we will use our tongue, whether to encourage people in a positive way or to hurt people in a cutting way.

*We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way. (James 3:2)*

Nobody's perfect. The tongue gets all of us into trouble. Controlling our lives, according to this verse, begins with controlling what we say. If we can get that under control, we will have the ability to control our actions, too. It's easy to end up in hot water because of our mouth. If we don't think before we speak, often the things that come out are not what we intend, and they hurt other people. It's been said that we've got one tongue and two ears for a good reason: so we'll listen twice as much as we talk!

*The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself. (James 3:5-6)*

The tongue is the strongest muscle in the whole body. It can destroy us if we don't control it! This paints a strong picture. Left unchecked, the tongue will cause a spark, which will create a forest fire of problems. But controlling our talk is

so difficult that we can't do it on our own. Only God has the power to help us as we commit to him what we say every day.

## **PRAYER POWER**

Praying for help to control our words is something most of us need to do often! Why not make a commitment to pray about it every day for two weeks or a month? You could tape a note to your mirror to remind yourself. Asking God on a daily basis to help you with your words will develop a great habit.

## TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS

All right, we've discussed honesty and bragging. What's next? How about not taking advantage of others? Let's think about how to define that. Taking advantage of someone means doing what you want to do without caring what the consequences might be for someone else. It also means looking out for yourself without considering others.

### BRAIN STRETCHERS

#### FOR KIDS:

1. How did Mike and Jimmy try to take advantage of each other?
2. Have you ever felt taken advantage of by someone else? What happened?

#### ASK AN ADULT:

1. In what ways does God show us that he respects us? (Hint: Read John 3:16 and John 15:15.)
2. What are some ways we can give God our respect? (Hint: Think about the week's theme verse, shown on the next page.)

## SCRIPTURE POWER

Let's review our theme verses for the week:

*Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."*  
(Mark 12:29-31)

If we're following those directions from Jesus, we'll be careful not to take advantage of other people. This is something Mike and Jimmy must have forgotten about! They most definitely thought about themselves first. Besides those great verses above, here's another one to think about:

*Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*  
(Colossians 3:12)

Pretty clear, isn't it? Since God loves everyone equally, he wants us to treat each other with all the kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience that he shows to us every minute of every day.

## PRAYER POWER

The week is nearly over, and we've dug into some great truths about honesty, controlling our tongue, and not taking advantage of others. Today, ask God to reveal ways in which you need to be more considerate of other people. You'll find that it's one of the most important elements of showing respect to them. Ask God for more sensitivity to recognize others' needs and feelings.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Mike and Jimmy lost a bet with Suzy because they both told her a secret about the other. In addition to their loose lips, they both tried to cheat the other in an attempt to win the bike-jump contest. Suzy taught them both a lesson by using their secrets against them.

It's tempting to fall into the habits of dishonesty, bragging, and taking advantage of others. We cheat a little, lie a little, and tell ourselves it's all in fun. Nobody will get seriously hurt, and we were just joking, anyway! When we boil it down, however, we find that doing these things to people means that we value others less and ourselves more.

If you could tell Mike, Jimmy, or Suzy anything at all about what you've learned from their story, what would you say? What lesson hit home the most for you: honesty? controlling your tongue? not taking advantage of others?

### LINE IT UP!

As you read the following situations, figure out why they are examples of

less-than-respectful behavior toward others. Discuss what responses would have been better.

- You got invited to a party, but your best friend didn't. She asks you to do something that same night, but you tell her you're sick so her feelings won't be hurt because she wasn't invited.
- You make plans to play basketball with friends after school. As you run out the door, you notice your little sister crying on the front porch. You hurriedly ask her what's wrong. When she tells you about it, you give her a quick hug, tell her, "It's okay," and then book it down the street to meet your pals.
- Your mom has been really sick with the flu all week, but you planned a party with your friends this weekend. You feel bad for your mom, whose help you'll need. However, you really don't want to reschedule the party because the guy or girl you like has already said yes to coming, and you're not sure another weekend would work for him or her. So you keep the party plans.

## **PRAYER POWER**

It's the end of the week, and hopefully you're feeling encouraged and challenged to apply some great lessons to your life. Why not take a moment to thank God for helping you grow? Then ask him to keep you sensitive to his leading as he teaches you to show respect for others through honesty, not bragging, and not trying to take advantage of people. His power can help you accomplish a lot!