

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

Adventures in
ODYSSEY

**90 Devotions
for Kids**

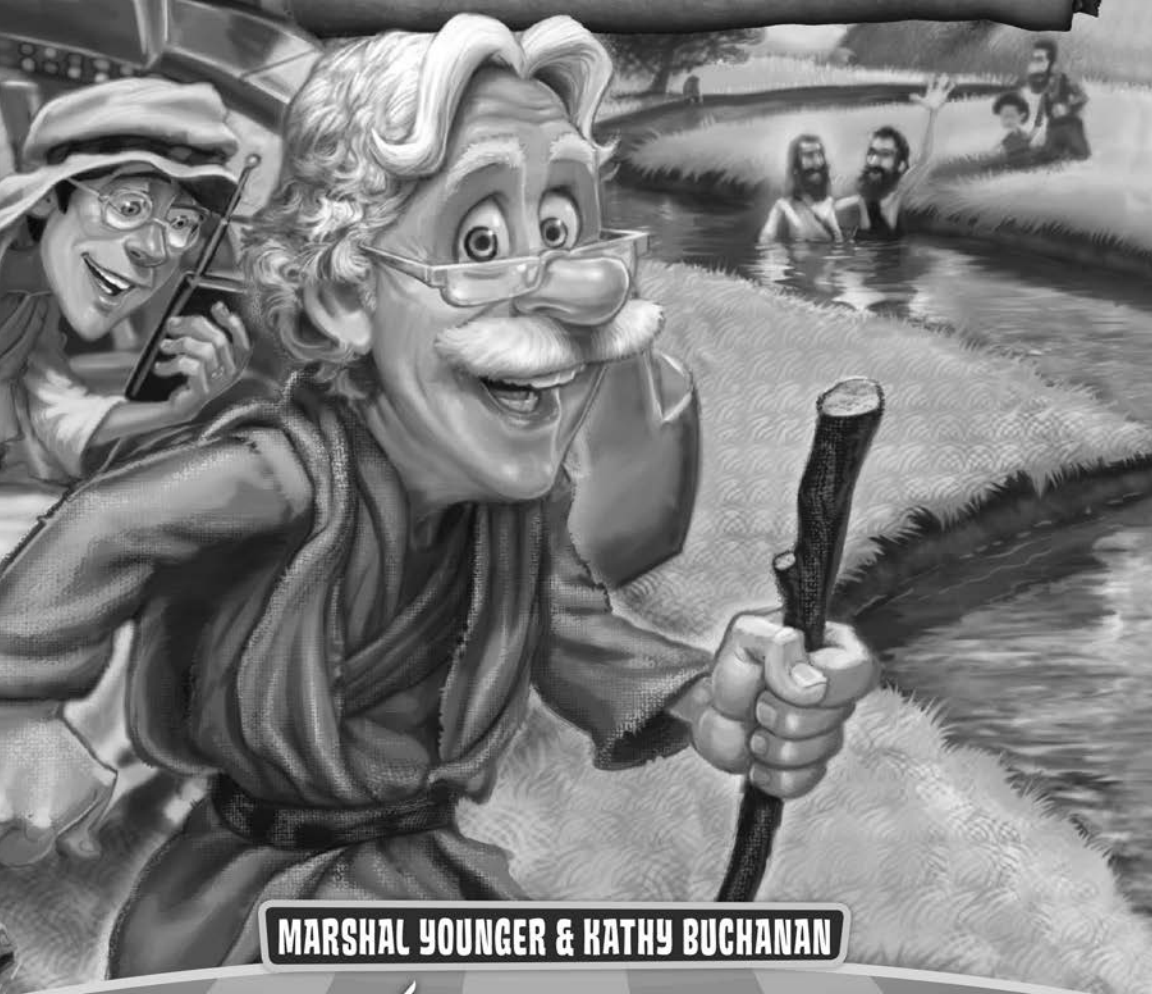


LIFE-CHANGING VALUES FROM THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

Adventures in
ODYSSEY

**90 Devotions
for Kids**



MARSHAL YOUNGER & KATHY BUCHANAN



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How to Use These Devotions

Welcome to the *90 Devotions for Kids* from the book of Matthew. I'm excited to be going through the life of Jesus with you for the next three months.

This book takes you through the entire book of Matthew. There are only a handful of verses that we skipped, and the devotionals go pretty much in the same order as the biblical text. If you are younger than age nine, I recommend that you go through this devotional with your parents. There are some difficult verses to understand, and your parents will probably do a fantastic job explaining them to you. If you decide to do the lessons without your parents, make sure you write down any questions you might have and ask someone later. I wouldn't want you to go too long with a question on your mind.

It's very important that you read the Scripture passage before you go through each devotional. Every day makes a reference to the Bible reading, and so the devotional by itself may not make sense without it. One of your goals in reading this book is to begin the habit of reading your Bible every day, if you're not already. Studying the Word of God daily is a key to growing in your relationship with Jesus.

Hopefully this book will be helpful in giving you the "big picture" about Jesus' life. Sometimes we know random stories and verses, but it's also beneficial to learn about the entire life of Jesus, in order, from His beautiful birth to His roller-coaster ministry to His agonizing death to His glorious resurrection. (Oops! I gave away the ending!) By the end of these ninety days, I hope you can learn to appreciate our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, even more.

—John Avery Whittaker



One Messy Family Tree

Read Matthew 1:1–17.

Wally Haggler wants to do what is right. But sometimes he thinks he can't, because his family is full of convicted criminals. In the Adventures in Odyssey episode "The Green Ring Conspiracy, Part I" (album 53), Wally learns that even though he can't control the actions of his relatives, he can choose to take charge of his life and do good things.

Wally isn't the only one with a family full of unsavory and shady characters. Even Jesus had some shady characters in His family. Today's Scripture passage contains a record of Jesus' ancestors. It's more than a list of funny names that are difficult to pronounce. God put that list in the Bible because He wanted to show us something important about Jesus' ancestors.

All the people on that list played a part in many Old Testament stories. Some of these people were heroes, and some were disappointments. Some were good and honorable. Others were known for lying, cheating, disobeying God, and even committing murder.

It makes you wonder why God would want His perfect Son to come from a family tree with rotten branches. Wouldn't God want Jesus' family to be filled with perfect people who were known for doing wonderful things?

But that's not the way God works. He uses imperfect people to carry out His purposes in the world. He also brings good from bad situations. Jesus came in all His goodness and glory to bring hope to a messy world—starting with a messy manger in a messy stable.



Loquacious Learning with Eugene

One of Jesus' most well-known ancestors was King David. He was known for being a courageous man who loved God. (Remember the story about David and Goliath in the Bible? David used a slingshot and the power of God to kill the disreputable Philistine.) David was even called "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). And yet this same man plotted the murder of a loyal soldier named Uriah so he could marry Uriah's wife! That isn't exactly the kind of behavior you'd expect from a king who said he followed God, is it? But God forgave David when he repented of his sins. David's life is a beautiful example of how God can bring good from our mistakes if we ask His forgiveness.

Jesus' lineage shows us that God can do amazing things, no matter what. He can use far-from-perfect people to make His perfect plans come about.

Daily Challenge

Ask your parents to tell you stories about your grandparents or even your great-grandparents. Talk about what you can learn from the wise choices and mistakes your relatives have made.

A New Name

Read Matthew 1:18–25.

What would you think if you came to school one day, and everyone started calling you the Kid Who Always Has Pizza for Lunch? What if your family called you the Child Who Leaves Her Dirty Socks on the Floor? And your neighborhood friends called you the One Who Always Wants to Go Swimming? What if people named you by the things you do?

You probably would change your behavior so you could be known as the Kid Who Always Gets Good Grades in Math or the One Who Usually Has Kind Words.

Did you know that God has a whole bunch of names in the Bible? Because He is so big and powerful and so many other great things, He can't be fully described by a single name. He's called *El Shaddai*, which means "God Almighty";¹ *Jehovah Jireh*, which means "provider";² *Elohim*, which means "strong one";³ and many other names.

In Matthew 1 we discover a new name for God that was given to His Son, Jesus. Did you see it when you read today's Bible passage? Yep, there it is in verse 23: *Immanuel*. "God with us."⁴ The name *Immanuel* describes a God who walks with us and knows us personally. It's not like the names for God in the Old Testament. Those make Him sound a little scary because He's so powerful and so far above us.

Jesus came to earth as Immanuel—*God with us*. He ate and drank with the poor and with people who were outcasts. He laughed heartily as He sat around telling His disciples stories. He shed tears when He saw someone in pain. He felt loneliness and fear and pain. Jesus walked alongside people and felt their feelings. He showed that God loves us and wants a relationship with us.



Connie's Corner

Hearing about what all the names of God mean made me wonder what my own name means. So I did some research and found out that my formal name, *Constance*, means “steadfast.” I kind of like that meaning, since I’m so consistent. You know, always on time, steady, even-tempered. On second thought, maybe it’s not so much a description of who I am right now, but a good reminder of who I want to become.

In the *Odyssey* adventure “Back to Bethlehem, Part 1” (album 10), Connie and Eugene witness the birth of Jesus when they travel to the Holy Land in the Imagination Station. They see for themselves that Jesus is born into a common life, and that His parents are ordinary people. His humble life on earth is a far cry from His royal home in heaven. But coming to earth as a human doesn’t change who Jesus has always been. He is still the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator and King of the universe.

The people of Jesus’ time couldn’t grasp that God chose to come to earth in human form so that He could walk among us. We can now call Jesus the Amazing God Who Came to Earth to Love Ordinary People Like You and Me!

Daily Challenge

In what ways is Jesus Immanuel, “God with us,” in your daily life? How is He with you at school? When you’re doing chores? When you’re at a baseball game? What special name could you give to Jesus that captures how much you appreciate His closeness to you?

What to Get the God Who Has Everything

Read Matthew 2:1–12.

Gold. Frankincense. Myrrh. These seem like strange gifts for a baby, don't they? Why didn't the wise men bring Jesus a cuddly blanket and a stuffed giraffe instead? But these gifts carried a special meaning and importance, perhaps even more than the wise men themselves realized. Here's why.

Gold was a gift that people in Bible times gave to honor a king.¹ The men from the East recognized Jesus as a child who would one day be a king. The wise men brought Jesus their most precious gifts to honor Him.

Frankincense was a costly, sweet-smelling gum from a tree that people offered as a gift to worship God.² Frankincense was burned during Jewish religious services, and the fragrance would fill the temple.

Myrrh was a symbol of bitterness, sorrow, and pain. It was also used to prepare bodies for burial. The wise men couldn't have known how Jesus would die, and yet they brought Him this gift.³

Giving the three gifts showed that the wise men honored Jesus as King and worshipped Him as God. These gifts also foreshadowed (gave a hint about the future) that one day Jesus would experience the sorrow and pain of death.

It's harder for us to come up with gift ideas for Jesus. We can't follow a star to heaven or ship Him a package via FedEx. What would we send Him anyway? He owns all the chocolate and music and electronic games in the world already!

But there is one gift we can give Him.

Here's a hint: Hebrews 13:15 says, "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice



Wandering with Wooton

Sometimes when the weather's crummy and my mailbag is heavy, I start to get grumpy. But I've learned that if I start looking around at things to be thankful for, it's hard to stay in a bad mood.

So I'll say, "God, thanks for the squirrels—even if they drop nuts on my head. And thank You for the rain that waters Mrs. Fenwick's tulips. And thanks for the snow, even if it's really, really cold, because it'll make for great sledding when I'm done with my route. Thanks, too, for warm clothes and for my yummy cinnamon-licorice chili that I'll get to make when I get home!" After thanking God for all these things, pretty soon I'm singing happy songs again.

Of course, then Mrs. Fenwick comes out and tells me I'm singing too loud and it's waking her cat. But that's okay. I'm even thankful for cats!

of praise." And Psalm 95:2 tells us, "Let us come to him and give him thanks. Let us praise him with music and song" (NIRV).

God loves it when we praise Him for everything He's done.

So let's give Him a gift He'll really appreciate. Send up a King-sized "You're awesome, God!" prayer of praise.

Daily Challenge

The book of Psalms is filled with poems and songs of praise and thanks to God. Write your own poem or compose a song about Jesus that reveals why He's important to you.

Power Plays

Read Matthew 2:13–23.

Every once in a while, you'll see a news report on TV about a huge forest fire. A video camera shows a man clutching his garden hose in his backyard, ready to fight the towering blaze with a trickle of water.

That's what the story of Herod is about in today's Bible reading. Herod was a very powerful king, but he was no match for God! After Jesus was born, Herod tried to stop God's plans by killing all the baby boys in Israel, but it didn't work. Like fighting a fire with a garden hose, Herod learned that God was much too powerful for him to take on.

Herod wasn't the only one who tried to outsmart God. Some people in Old Testament times thought they could build a tower to heaven so they would be as powerful as God (see Genesis 11:1–8). Another time, the priests of Baal thought they could prove that their god was more powerful than Elijah's God. So they prayed to Baal and asked him to send down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:16–38). And Pharaoh thought that he could make the Israelites stay in Egypt as his slaves (Exodus 5:1–8).

But guess what? No one had the power to change God's plans. And neither do we. No matter what we do, God never says, "Wow! I didn't see that coming. Guess I'll try something else." We can ignore God or disobey Him or turn away from Him, but it never works!

God helped Joseph and Mary keep Jesus alive by sending them all to Egypt. God will work out His plans with or without us—but it's a lot more rewarding to be a part of His plans! We can't wreck God's plans any more than King Herod could. It's like trying to put out a forest fire with a garden hose!



Loquacious Learning with Eugene

Consider these statistics: The sun is believed to be approximately 864,938 miles in diameter,¹ and it's not even one of the largest stars! So far, scientists have discovered more than 370,000 species of beetles.² And the human brain contains close to 100 billion nerve cells,³ which increase in number as you learn new things. If God is powerful enough to create all these things, I'm quite certain He can handle any problems we might have.

In the *Odyssey* episode “The Power of One” (album 44), a Kids’ Radio broadcast includes a rhyming tale about Samson to highlight God’s power. God gives Samson great power, but Samson starts to think his power is his own, not God’s. Samson eventually learns the hard way that God is the One with all the power! (Check out the true story of Samson in Judges 13–16.)

Here’s an idea: Learn from other people’s mistakes, and don’t challenge God!

Daily Challenge

At the top of a sheet of paper, write out Philippians 4:13: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Always remember that God can give you the courage and strength you need.

Brave Words

Read Matthew 3:1-12.

Today, the Italian astronomer Galileo is called “the father of modern science.” Back in the 1600s, he was known as a great scientist. But did you know that he was also a convicted criminal?

Galileo studied the planets and stars, and he also discovered that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system. At the time, people believed that the sun, stars, and other planets revolved around the earth. But Galileo insisted that the earth moved around the sun! When Galileo tried to persuade people that his special knowledge was true, the religious leaders put him on trial. The court convicted Galileo of spreading lies (heresy), and he spent the last nine years of his life under house arrest.

Can you believe it? Galileo was thrown in prison for being right about the earth! And he was actually the one who was right! His special knowledge was accurate.

John the Baptist was also right. He didn't know much about the solar system, but he knew a lot about Jesus. Like Galileo, John was unpopular with the religious leaders of his day, who were called Sadducees and Pharisees. John was unpopular not just because he wore odd clothes and ate locusts (which is definitely weird!). People also disliked him because God gave him special knowledge about who Jesus was, and John was brave enough to talk about it.

John told everyone who came to the desert, “After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry” (Matthew 3:11). He also told people that Jesus would “[burn] up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (verse 12). That fire language was code for “God’s going to judge you unless you



Whit's Wisdom

Some people think that John the Baptist invented baptism, but it was actually practiced many years before John the Baptist or Jesus entered the picture. Baptism symbolizes washing sin away. The people John baptized were showing that they were sorry for their sins and wanted to change (repent). After Jesus died and was raised to life again, baptism took on a new meaning. Christians are baptized to publicly proclaim that we have died with Christ (by going into the water) and have been resurrected with Him (by coming out of the water). It's an outward sign that we have been saved and have made a commitment to follow Christ.

say you're sorry for doing wrong, and stop doing it." Many people listened to John, but many powerful people thought he was wrong. (Sneak preview: In the next chapter of Matthew, John lands in jail!)

Because of Galileo's bravery, scientists in the seventeenth century could study the solar system in a new way. And because John the Baptist (and others after him) was brave enough to tell people about Jesus, we can all know the special knowledge about God.

Daily Challenge

What special knowledge do you have about Jesus? What does the New Testament say about Him? Make a list of what Jesus has done for you and your family. Think of three friends or family members who need to know about Jesus. Then be brave enough to tell them about Him.

Stamp of Approval

Read Matthew 3:13–17.

Imagine that your team is in the state basketball championship. You have only five seconds to win the game for Mid-America Middle School. You take a quick glance at the scoreboard. The ball is in your hands, and your team is trailing 48 to 50. You tune out the shouts from the crowd and the screech of sneakers against the wood court. You even ignore the player in front of you, who is waving his arms to keep you from taking a shot.

There's no way you can pass to anyone. So you shoot the ball from center court toward the hoop. The buzzer sounds. The gymnasium falls silent as the ball rolls around the rim twice and then three times . . . and then drops in! A three-pointer and a big win!

Immediately your teammates lift you onto their shoulders. You search the crowd, looking for the one person you want to see cheering for you. Not the principal or your coach or the cute classmate you have a crush on. There he is! He's wearing a yard-long grin and waving an upturned thumb. Your dad. And Mom is right beside him, jumping up and down and screaming your name.

Most of us want to make our parents proud. And even though we don't always agree with everything they say (like "You're grounded!" or "Clean your room"), it's super-important to us that our parents think well of us.

When Jesus was baptized, His Father in heaven gave His approval by sending down His Spirit in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). The dove landed on Jesus as God the Father spoke from heaven for all to hear: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (verse 17).



Connie's Corner

Since my parents' divorce years ago, I don't see my dad very often. And it sometimes hurts to know that he's not around to teach me how to fix a flat tire or laugh at my corny jokes or just pat me on the shoulder and tell me he's proud of me. I'm grateful that Whit has been a father figure to me, but I've also learned to lean on God more when I miss having a dad around. I know God loves me more than any human father ever could, and even when I make mistakes (which, I admit, sometimes happens), He still loves me and is proud to call me His daughter.

With those words, God claimed Jesus as His very own Son and showed that He was proud of Jesus. This happened even before Jesus had performed any miracles or preached any sermons! Jesus was baptized to set an example for us. He was already perfect and didn't need to have His sins forgiven. But He was baptized to show the importance of loving and obeying God.

You also make God proud when you make wise choices. His smile is a mile long when He sees you caring for others. He cheers when you choose to act Christlike even though it's hard. He understands that you're going to mess up, and He doesn't expect you to be perfect—that's Jesus' job. But remember, when you do obey His words, you're not only helping yourself live better, but you're also making your heavenly Dad really proud. And His approval is way more important than anyone else's.

Daily Challenge

List some words that describe what fathers should be like. Maybe *caring*, *strong*, and *a good example* are a few of the words on your list. Then jot down some examples of how God is like a father to you.

Fighting Back

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

Imagine innocently stepping outside your house on a snowy day. The air is crisp; the deep banks of snow are sparkling in the sunlight. Then suddenly . . . *SPLAT!* You get smacked in the back of the head with a snowball. Then more snowballs come at you. *Splat! Splat! Splat!* You run around the side of the house and peer around the corner, and from there you see the problem. On the other side of the yard, your brother has made a pile of snowballs as tall as he is. Uh-oh . . . you're in trouble now!

The first thing you need is a way to defend yourself. That's why you're hiding behind the house. But you'll also need to fight back with some snowballs of your own. A lot of them!

Jesus had a similar experience when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness. Jesus was weak from not eating for forty days. Then all of a sudden, the devil threw temptation after temptation at Him. *Splat! Splat! Splat!* Did you notice how Jesus handled these three temptations? He fought back with "ammunition" from God's Word! It's just like having a pile of snowballs ready to throw back at your brother.

In the *Odyssey* episode "The Devil Made Me Do It" (album 32), Satan's lies are exposed during the Slimy Awards, and believers are shown how to fight temptation. During the ceremony, awards are given to the best demons in the industry. But technical difficulties (God's Word) prevent the show from continuing.

You, too, can use the ammunition of God's Word to fight temptation. Memorize Bible verses one at a time—just like making snowballs. For instance, the next



Whit's Wisdom

One of my favorite verses about temptation is 1 Corinthians 10:13, which says, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure.”

time you're tempted to call your sister a name because she's being incredibly annoying, just remind yourself, “Anyone who has knowledge controls his words. A man who has understanding is not easily upset” (Proverbs 17:27, NIV).

God has given you a whole Book of truth to fight the lies of the enemy. So use it—just like Jesus did!

Daily Challenge

Ask a friend to help you memorize Scripture. You can practice reciting verses to each other. Some great verses to start with are John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8–9, Romans 8:28, Psalm 27:1, Proverbs 3:5–6, Philippians 4:6–7, and Matthew 5:16. Ask your parents or a youth leader for more ideas.

Puzzle #1

Jesus' Family Tree

Fill in this crossword with the names of some famous and not-so-famous ancestors of Jesus. To find the names of some of the people, you'll have to look up a Bible verse first. We've filled in two names for you (Amminadab and Zerah).

Genesis 17:9 _____

Abijah

Ahaz

Amminadab

Amon

Azor

2 Samuel 5:4 _____

Eleazar

Eliakim

2 Chronicles 29:20 _____

Hezron

Isaac

Genesis 25:31 _____

Jeconiah

Jehoram

Jesse

Joseph

Genesis 43:3 _____

Luke 1:30 _____

Obed

Perez

Joshua 6:17 _____

Ram

Ruth 1:16 _____

Salmon

1 Kings 3:8-10 _____

Tamar

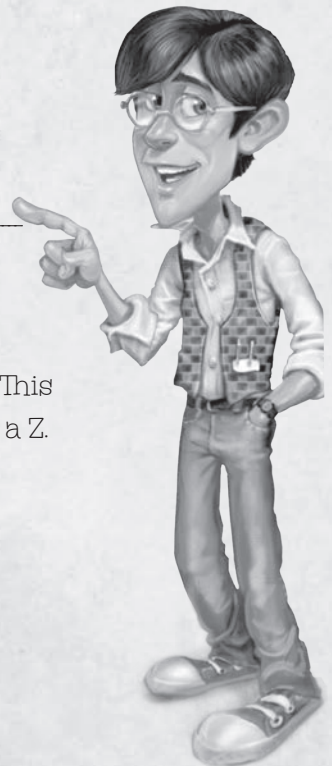
Uzziah

Zerah

Haggai 2:4 _____ (This

name starts with a Z.

Spell it carefully!)



Puzzle #1



Answers on page 208.