

Finding **JESUS** *on*
**UPSIDE
DOWN
DAYS**

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FAMILY DEVOTIONS FROM THE BARNYARD

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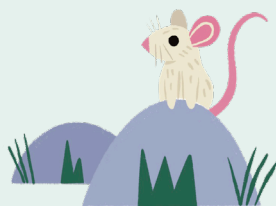
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Acknowledgments

WELCOME!

PLEASE COME INTO MY BARNYARD AND MEET MY ANIMALS.

I like to call them my friends. I love it when my daughter Kim, my grandkids, and neighborhood kids come to visit—and I'm not the only one! My friends love it when children come because they know I'll break out the animal crackers. The sound of the red lid turning on the plastic bear cookie jar makes the barnyard sing.

Chuckie and Kisses bray excitedly. They have been together since they were three weeks old. They were born in New York state. My husband Paul gave them to me for my birthday. One day after teaching kindergarten, I found carrots and a balloon tied to my mailbox. Driving down the driveway, standing in the field, were two mini-Jerusalem donkeys! As soon as I saw their ears, bellies, and deep-set brown eyes, it was love at first sight—for all three of us.

You see, over the years, Paul got sad watching me be sad when my dogs and goats died. So Paul got me “the boys,” Chuckie and Kisses. They could live to be forty years old! Maybe one of my grandkids will take care of them after I go to heaven.

Oh boy! What is that banging? It's Chezlee, and he desperately wants his breakfast. Goodness, he rams his horns into the door just to tell me he's hungry. All 180 pounds of him. You would think he's starving, but after you look at him, you'll know he's well fed! Edith, Chezlee's sister, yells a lot. She is always trying to keep him in line. And that can be a challenge. Chezlee and Edith are called fainting goats. They faint when they are happy or scared. And I mean *faint*. Backs on the ground and four hooves stiff in the air!

Then there is Nuah. That is the Hebrew word for “rest.” Paul likes the Hebrew language. He once tried learning it but never got beyond naming my animals. Nuah is nervous, and she rarely rests because she’s so stressed. But Nuah goes nuts over treats! She is a sweet, small pygmy goat who loves to climb and jump.

We don’t live on a farm, but we live next to a beautiful farm owned by Mr. Beer. He is a real farmer, and he loves Jesus. Mr. Beer tells me I’m a wannabe farmer. It’s true! But I want to wait to be a real farmer until I’m in heaven—where there won’t be bugs or disease or bad weather or animals that die. But I’d still love to drive a tractor, even now. I’m just not sure Mr. Beer is up to giving me lessons!

When I share my final animal crackers with my friends, and I close the gate behind me, I almost hear them say, “Thank you, Grammy!”

Here come my sweet dogs, Anaiah and Tully, greeting me with wagging tails and a few happy barks. Anaiah is the angel dog. She’s even white like an angel. She would love just to sit with kids under a big tree. Tully, on the other hand, prefers chasing tennis balls until your arm feels like it’s going to fall off.

Many days seem to be upside down. Topsy-turvy. Right from the get-go, the day seems out of control. But in the craziness, there can be peace. Psalm 37:23 says, “The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives” (NLT).

When I go out to the barnyard every day, God pops those “details” into my head. As I take care of the animals and see all he has made, he takes my upside-down soul and sets it right-side up. I hope these stories do the same for you!

I’m so glad you’re meeting my friends. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do!

God is so good,
Jill for all

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Paul is my husband. We've been married for fifty years!

Kim is the fourth of our six children. She has several disabilities, one of which is autism. Kim uses a computer and sign language to talk. Each day, she walks several different dogs while their “mommies and daddies” work. This is her job.

Mr. Beer is our next-door neighbor. He owns a beautiful farm that grows wheat, corn, and soy. He also has about fifty cows.

Chuckie and **Kisses** are miniature Jerusalem donkeys. They have been together since they were three weeks old. We adopted them at age three years. Now they are about thirteen and could live till they are forty years old! I call them “the boys.”



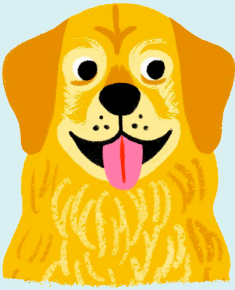
Chezlee and **Edith** are twins. They are fainting goats. And they really faint!





Berachah is an introverted pygmy goat.

Getty is a pygmy goat, and she had a kid (baby) named **Nuah**. **Nuah** is always nervous when meeting new friends.



Tove was a beautiful golden retriever. She had seven puppies, one of which is **Hessid**.

Anaiah is a golden retriever. She's actually white, not golden.

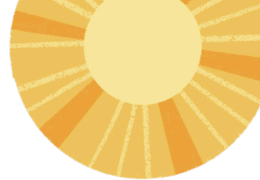


Tully is a golden retriever who enjoys welcoming people into our house. One day he pulled Kim's bedspread off her bed and drug it down a flight of steps, just to give the plumber a "gift."

Bruiser is a dog who lived down our street. He enjoyed playing with Tove and Hessid.



Cooper is a beagle. He is also an escape artist.



WHY?

We live next to Mr. Beer. He has been a farmer for more than sixty-five years! He has cows, chickens, horses, and sheep. I enjoy talking to Mr. Beer and learning how he grows corn, soy, and wheat. I also like to hear about his animals. Mr. Beer is a busy farmer. That is how he makes his living.

One day, after I had fed my friends, Mr. Beer drove up to me on his tractor. He asked, “Why do you have these animals?”

“I just love animals and enjoy them,” I said.

“Do you get milk from the goats to sell?” asked Mr. Beer.

“No, I just love the goats and enjoy watching them play,” I said.

“Maybe you could make goat cheese. People enjoy eating that,” responded Mr. Beer.

“No, I have the goats to make me laugh. They are funny to watch—how they jump from rock to rock—how they chase one another around. Really, I just enjoy the goats and love them.”

“Oh. I never heard of that before. Well, what are you going to do with the boys? Are they going to do tricks? Are they going to pull your grandkids in a cart?” The questions flowed out of Mr. Beer’s mind as he suggested ways the animals could make money for me.

“Mr. Beer, I just love to brush the boys and watch them play. They will run around the field as if they are great big dogs playing tug of war with their toys.”

Mr. Beer chuckled and replied, “I have never heard of that before!”

“Have you seen Paul and I walk the boys? I love to take them on a quiet Sunday walk down your gravel path. As we walk, they pull out their favorite weeds and chomp away. After our walk, as I take off their lead, Kisses will give me one of his hugs.”

“No. I haven’t ever seen you walk them, or anybody else walk donkeys! And I have never seen or felt a donkey hug me or anybody else!” replied Mr. Beer. “You mean to tell me that you don’t make any money from your animals?”

“Nope. I just love and enjoy them.”

One day as I was with the boys, the thought came to me that I don’t have to do anything special for God to love me either. God loves and enjoys me, just like I love and enjoy my friends.

DEUTERONOMY 7:6-8a

You are a holy nation. The LORD your God has set you apart for himself. He has chosen you to be his special treasure. He chose you out of all the nations on the face of the earth to be his people. The LORD chose you because he loved you very much. He didn't choose you because you had more people than other nations. In fact, you had the smallest number of all. The LORD chose you because he loved you.



PROVERBS 17:17

A friend loves at all times. They are there to help when trouble comes.

THE BOYS

I have a small barn that looks like a shed. In most sheds, you find lawn mowers and bicycles. But in our small barn, you will find animals. I have two miniature Jerusalem donkeys. They are both boys, and they are brothers. They are about four years old. Their names are Chuckie and Kisses. Chuckie is a good name for a boy donkey, but I don't think Kisses is. Once you get to know Kisses, you will understand why that's his name.

Have you ever come home from school after a hard day? Maybe your friends left you out of a game at recess. Maybe you got a C on a spelling test that you worked hard on and had studied for and had written each word three times. Maybe someone told a story about you, and it wasn't kind or true. How would you feel? Rotten. Sad. Like you wanted to be alone.

Well, sometimes when I go out to the boys, it is after I have had one of those days. Chuckie and Kisses like to be brushed, they like fresh water and hay, and they love animal crackers or their special cookies. Without saying a word, I will start my work. Cleaning, feeding, brushing, and watering. As I stoop down to clean up the hay, Kisses will stand right next to me. All of a sudden, I feel a warm, heavy weight on my back. It is Kisses's head. After he leans his head over my back, he will pull me close to him. I am getting a donkey hug!

Kisses knows when I am sad. He knows when I need a hug. I don't have to tell him how I feel; he just knows. What a good friend!

THE GOATS

1 CORINTHIANS 13: 6-7

Love . . . always protects.

I also have goats in the barnyard. Two of them are twins, and they are three years old. The girl is named Edith. The boy is named Chezlee. Now, Chezlee and Edith are fainting goats. When they get either really happy or really scared, they faint—right over on their backs—with their little hooves in the air.

Chuckie, Kisses, Edith, and Chezlee like to eat together, sleep together, and play together. They are all friends.

One day, when I was unpacking groceries from the car, I heard Edith yell. It wasn't a happy yell. It was more like a scared yell. I dropped the bag of groceries and ran into the pasture to see what was going on. Kisses was standing close to Edith with a worried face. Edith had fainted and was on her back with her hooves straight in the air, petrified. I waited for Edith to get up and begin walking. As she did, Kisses began to relax. I went back to my car and finished putting away the groceries.

A few days later, I saw my friends from my kitchen window. They were playing together and having a fun time. Remember, when fainting goats get happy, what do they do? Faint! Kisses and Edith were enjoying chasing, pushing, and rolling a red ball. The more they chased, the stiffer Edith got. Oh no! One, two, three—down for the count! There goes Edith, hooves in the air. I could tell by looking at Kisses that he was upset. (You know how you can tell what people are thinking by looking at their face? Like when someone is mad at you?) Kisses thought he hurt Edith

and that she was on the ground because of him. But Edith was on the ground because she fainted from having so much fun.

So, like a good friend, Kisses tried to get Edith back on her feet—or should I say hooves. The more Kisses tried to help Edith, the stiffer Edith got—and the stiffer Edith got, the more scared Kisses became. Get the picture? So now Kisses really knew it was up to him to help Edith. With determination, Kisses took Edith's back leg and began to pull her toward the barn. You see, the boys are very smart.

Donkeys know that the safest place for an animal to be is inside a barn, not out in the pasture. An animal, like a coyote, looks for animals stranded in pastures, and Kisses knew he had to protect his friend, Edith.

At this point, I ran out and tried to help both of them. I told Kisses that Edith really was okay, and that she would be able to get up and walk in a couple minutes after he let go of her leg. Then I told Edith that she didn't have to be afraid—that Kisses was really trying to protect her.

Good friends protect each other—even the ones that faint!



THE MORNING WALK

PSALM 37:4a

Find your delight in the LORD.

This morning Hessid and I went for a walk. Our house is right next to Mr. Beer's beautiful farm, and he allows us to walk down a path between his pastures. This allows Hessid to be unleashed, and for her and I to waddle down the road at our own pace. Sometimes in the morning, when it is still foggy, we can see the blurry, gray shapes of deer slowly grazing on the fresh green grass—or a fox running back to its den to take care of its precious kits. Hessid and I love to go on these walks!

However, lately Hessid and I have been sad on our morning walks. This is because Tove, Hessid's mom, died recently. It was always Tove, Hessid, and me on the path between the pastures. Tove was never without Hessid, and Hessid was never without Tove. Every morning, they always ended up chasing each other by the end of the walk. I can still see their beautiful, full, golden tails wagging in unison as they ran after each other. But now it is just Hessid and me.



To add a little “life” to our walk, I bring three dog biscuits with me. Before I leave the house, Hessid waits for the clunk of the doggie jar lid and the sound of me grabbing three bone-shaped veggie biscuits. I put all three biscuits in my sweatshirt pocket, and then Hessid and I leave the house and trot off down the path together. Hessid stays close to me, looking up at me regularly to make sure that I will remember to give her the treats. At the end of the path, where we turn around to come back to the house, I give her the first treat. I break the biscuit into three pieces so Hessid is able to taste the treat and not do the big gulp.

On our way back to the house, Hessid is close to me. With each step, I feel her soft furry side hit my leg. She looks up at me with her beautiful, deep, brown eyes. She has the look of such loyalty and devotion. Or maybe the look of, “Hey! I know you have two more treats in your pocket!” Then I see her front paws lift off the ground, and her nose pokes my sweatshirt pocket. Okay, forget the devotion; this is about food.

I thought to myself, *Am I like Hessid, with Jesus? Do I hang out right next to him because he gives me goodies?*

I want Hessid to love me—not just the treats. Jesus wants me to love him and not just the gifts he gives me!

I want Hessid to know I love her. Jesus wants me to know he loves me.

I want Hessid to stay next to me and enjoy me because of me. Jesus wants me to stay next to him and enjoy him because of him.

