

Volume 2

THE



VERY BEST,

HANDS-ON,



KINDA DANGEROUS

FAMILY

52  
ACTIVITIES YOUR  
KIDS WILL NEVER  
FORGET

DEVOTIONS



TIM SHOEMAKER

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Don't have all the supplies for one of the devotionals? Borrowing is a great option . . . if you remember these three things.

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## OBJECT LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES

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### **1. Money to Burn 29**

**THEME:** We can trust God when we're in a tough spot.

Lighting a \$20 bill on fire—and observing that it is not harmed by the fire—is something you absolutely have to see to believe. It ignites a great discussion of how we can trust God when the heat is on.

### **2. Gone Forever 34**

**THEME:** God forgives our sins . . . and we should do that for others.

Throwing rocks into a lake or the ocean, never to be seen again, will remind our kids how God deals with our sin when we ask his forgiveness . . . and how we should do the same for others.

### 3. Minute to Win It 38

**THEME:** Some elements of the Christian life (like trusting and obeying God) require practice if we want to be effective.

We'll run through some classic Minute to Win It challenges to drive home the point that we only become effective with some elements of the Christian life with practice.

### 4. Lose the Diaper 43

**THEME:** Holding on to a grudge has some very unpleasant side effects.

A little experiment with a disposable diaper will help us see the importance of shedding nasty things, like resentment and grudges, instead of wearing them around like a dirty diaper.

### 5. Fuel on the Fire 49

**THEME:** Do we add fuel to the fires of family tension—or do we calm things down?

Have you ever tossed a handful of Coffee-Mate nondairy creamer on a fire? It flares up nicely, like you've got some magic dust or powder in your hands! This will open a talk about how we have the power in our hands to make the tension or fire between us and other family members flare up—or die down. We'll have an emphasis on talking kindly to one another.

### 6. Bridge Builders 54

**THEME:** Building bridges to those who are distant from us—or isolated from others—and seeing the “unseen” and reaching out to them.

You'll need chairs for this one, or anything else you can use to build a makeshift bridge. You'll put one or two kids out on an “island” and build a bridge to get to them. This will pave the way to talk about seeing the lonely, isolated, or “unseen” kids . . . and how we can build bridges to reach them.

## 7. Escalator Epiphany 58

**THEME:** If we aren't actively climbing in the Christian life, likely the world will pull us down.

In this world of moving stairways and doors that open automatically, it gets pretty easy to let others do the work for us. That definitely won't work for the Christian life! Climbing up the down escalator will be a great way to demonstrate that we need to put in some effort as Christians. If we aren't constantly climbing, the world will pull us down.

## 8. The Start or the Finish? 62

**THEME:** How we start is important, but how we finish matters most.

A simple kids' game of Simon Says will impress on the kids that a strong start isn't enough. God is often more interested in how we finish.

## 9. Be a Bozo 66

**THEME:** The importance of persevering with a good attitude when facing unkind words or actions.

A classic clown inflatable bop bag isn't only fun to hit but teaches the importance of persevering with a good attitude and a smile on our face when facing unkind words or actions, even in our own family.

## 10. Concrete Shoes 71

**THEME:** The longer we wait to step away from sin, the harder it is to break free.

A 5-gallon bucket and some fresh cement will demonstrate a simple truth: the longer we wait to step away from sin, the harder it is to break free.

## 11. The Things We Miss When We Have Our Nose to the Phone 76

**THEME:** There are rewards to being more present and engaged wherever we're at, rather than focused on a screen.

The kids will run a little race—while texting on their phone the entire time. They'll be focused on the screen, and they'll overlook some

important things you've planted on the route for them. This will open a talk about what we miss right around us while we're on our phones.

## 12. Strength Sappers 82

**THEME:** Exposure to fear, worry, and anxiety can leave us weak and unprotected.

Soaking an egg in vinegar will slowly eat away at the shell, leaving an unprotected, gelatinous egg. What a great way to illustrate how exposure to fear, worry, anxiety, and more can leave us unprotected and weak!

## 13. Take Me to Your Leader 87

**THEME:** Choosing wisely who we follow and who we shouldn't. Great leaders know who to follow . . . and who to avoid.

A little game of following another car leads to a great discussion about who our kids follow and who to avoid. Often, we want our kids to be leaders, but God wired us to be followers too. Sometimes the *best* leaders have simply learned *who* to follow.

## 14. Holy Howling Hex Nut 92

**THEME:** The importance of listening to that voice inside us—even when we don't understand it or it scares us.

A balloon and a hex nut are all you need to talk about the importance of listening to that voice inside us—even when we don't fully understand it.

## 15. Hard Work Pays Off 98

**THEME:** Being a good worker instead of being lazy. A good work ethic will be rewarded.

Making ice cream is hard work, but there are some nice perks. That leads right into a talk about how the Bible stresses the importance of being good workers instead of being lazy. A person who possesses a good work ethic will often be appreciated—and rewarded.

## 16. Magnetic Christians 104

**THEME:** As Christians, we're to cling to some things and repel others—and not get the two mixed up.

Good magnets cling tight, but they are also designed to repel. We'll use some ring magnets to remind the kids of some things we should cling tight to—and other things we should avoid.

## 17. Remember No More 109

**THEME:** The completeness of God's forgiveness and the gratitude we should feel as a result.

When God forgives, he chooses to “remember our sins no more.” A quick, 8-second demo will teach the kids how God forgives in a way that they'll never, ever forget.

## 18. Fix a Flat 114

**THEME:** Getting back on the road as a Christian after experiencing a setback.

Changing a tire with the kids will roll you right into a talk about the things that can drive them to the shoulder in the Christian life. More importantly, we'll talk about how to get back on the road!

## 19. Pin the Tail on the Donkey—with a Twist 119

**THEME:** Listening to the right voices to become the people God wants us to be.

The old party game but with a twist: a timer and two “distracters” whacking our poor blindfolded contestant with whacky noodles and giving wrong verbal instructions. One parent will also be giving instructions—but the right ones. If we're going to become the people God wants us to be, we need to listen to the right voices.

## 20. Car Wash 123

**THEME:** Rules prevent trouble and damage that would result if they weren't followed.

Take the family to a car wash where you get to stay inside the car. Most car washes post the same instructions: roll up your windows, put your car in neutral, and keep your foot off the brake. Those rules aren't meant to be restricting but to keep you safe while your car gets cleaned. This opens the door to a quick discussion about other areas of life where following the rules is about our protection.

## 21. Christians and Flameproof Balloons 128

**THEME:** Christians should be different from those who don't have Christ, especially in the ways they react when the heat is on.

As Christians, our reactions to trouble or hard things should be different from those who don't have Christ. We'll demonstrate that truth . . . with fire.

## 22. Three-Legged Race 133

**THEME:** The importance of dating only another solid Christian.

Probably the most convincing, most powerful devotional you'll ever see about the importance of only dating a Christian. A three-legged race will drive the point home in such a way that the kids will get it like never before. Remember, the ideal time to talk about this is long before the kids start dating.

## 23. Stick This in Your Head 139

**THEME:** Loving God and loving others, but you can adapt this to teach anything you want the kids to remember.

This one is a wild card as far as the theme goes. You can easily adapt this to teach a wide range of topics—any truth you never want the kids to forget. With some Styrofoam and solvent, we'll help the kids remember how they need to love God and love others.

## 24. Time Gobblers 144

**THEME:** The need to guard against things in our lives that eat up more time than they should.

God only gives us so much time. We need to guard against things in our lives that gobble up way more time than they should. Phones. Video games. Whatever fits. We'll use Styrofoam and a solvent to illustrate the point.

## 25. Clean Up Your Act 148

**THEME:** Doing things without arguing or complaining.

Have the kids help with a task such as washing the car or vacuuming the house . . . you'll come up with something. There are only two rules: work hard and no complaining or arguing while they work. Anyone who doesn't work—or who complains—gets a shot of water from the hose. Good clean fun, but a great reminder of the need to have good work habits—which includes working without complaining or arguing.

Note: The following two devotions use the same object lesson.

## 26. Rubber-Boned Christians 153

**THEME:** Having strong “spiritual bones” so we can stand firm as Christians and avoid things that weaken us.

We need strong “spiritual bones” to stand firm as Christians. We need to avoid the things that tend to weaken our bones and immerse ourselves in the things that strengthen them.

## 27. The Acid Effect of Envy 157

**THEME:** Guarding against envy—and how it will weaken us if we don't.

Vinegar and chicken bones will help us illustrate an important truth for the Christian life. Envy isn't simply wrong; it's dangerous. If we stay in its acid juices, it will weaken us.



## 28. Will It Sink or Swim? 162

**THEME:** When facing anxiety, God can help us in ways we'd never expect.

When we're facing anxiety, kids often feel alone—and that no one really understands their situation. This simple demo with a garbage can of water and a bowling ball will remind them how God cares about our big concerns, even if they seem small to others. And we'll show how God can help us in ways we'd never expect.

## 29. I See That Hand 168

**THEME:** Being a true disciple of Jesus, and how those who aren't are missing something.

There are plenty of people who like the idea of being a Christian, but often they aren't exactly "raising their hands" and aren't eager to be disciples of Jesus. Could it be that they're missing something?

## 30. Wrong Place, Wrong Time 174

**THEME:** Keeping our Christian batteries charged to avoid dangerous situations.

A mobile phone with a dead battery gives us a great starting point to talk about something important. If we don't keep our Christian batteries charged, we'll likely end up in some dangerous situations.

## 31. Who Floats Your Boat? 179

**THEME:** The friends you choose and confide in are important. They'll help keep your head above water . . . or not.

A ride in a canoe is all you need to show the importance of the types of friends your kids let in their lives. There are those who will help us keep our heads above water—and those who will take us down.

## 32. Nerves of Steel 186

**THEME:** How to strengthen yourself in the Lord.

We know our faith should be strong enough to overcome our fears. Easier said than done, especially when trouble is in our face or headed there. We'll use an egg, a makeshift bungee cord, and one brave volunteer to teach how we strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

## 33. Chameleon 192

**THEME:** Choosing friends carefully.

The company we keep matters. Sometimes the values of our friends, or those we're around a lot, rub off on us—and stick. We'll use vinegar and pennies to make our point.

## 34. Blowing Your Top 197

**THEME:** Dealing with anger properly instead of burying it.

Lashing out in anger is bad, but so is stuffing it inside and not dealing with it. Pressure will build . . . and we're in for an explosion. A simple demo with vinegar and baking soda will help them remember this lesson.

## 35. Porn: Toxic. Twisting. Trap. 202

**THEME:** Pornography is wrong biblically, and it is a trap.

Pornography is epidemic, and kids are getting exposed to this toxin at younger and younger ages. We'll do a very cool outdoor experiment with sulfuric acid and sugar to illustrate why they should avoid pornography, and how it twists God's plan.

## 36. Vacuum-Packed 211

**THEME:** God can help us conquer fear.

A small vacuum and a big plastic bag are all you need to teach a fantastic lesson about how fear can paralyze us—and how God helps us conquer it!

Note: The following two devotions use the same object lesson.

### 37. Reaching Friends in Darkness 217

**THEME:** We must be a light to reach our friends in darkness.

You will love, love, love this one! A simple chemical reaction will help demo to the kids how they must be a light—a good example of what it is to be a Christian—if they want to reach their friends in the darkness.

## The Very Best HOLIDAY Devotions

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### 38. Christmas: We Don't Have to Be Scared of the Dark Anymore 222

**THEME:** We don't have to be afraid of the dark, because the Light of the World has come.

Here's your chance to use a fun object lesson to teach a fantastic truth from John 8:12 about how Jesus came to bring light into our dark world, and what that means for us.

### 39. Christmas: So Close, but Yet So Far 226

**THEME:** Making the effort to seek out Jesus personally.

You'll take the kids for a six-mile drive to grab a meal or dessert at someplace special. Six miles . . . exactly the distance the religious leaders failed to travel when they learned that a king was born in Bethlehem. They didn't make the effort and missed the chance to meet the one who could change their eternity. Which raises the question, How much effort do we make to meet Jesus for ourselves?

### 40. Easter: The Cross Most Never See 231

**THEME:** The cross was a weapon Jesus used to defeat sin and death.

Jesus's death on the cross wasn't the end of Jesus, as some hoped . . . but he did *finish* some things on the cross. With pieces of wood and a pail of sand we'll show how the cross wasn't only a cruel way to kill Jesus but also a sword that he used to defeat sin and death.

## 41. Fourth of July: Freedom Worth Celebrating 236

**THEME:** The freedom Jesus earned for us is something we should celebrate.

Blowing off some fireworks is a great way to start this devotional—and will lead perfectly into a timely reminder. The freedom Jesus earned for us is far greater and something we should celebrate too.

## 42. Thanksgiving: Dead Turkeys Don't Fly 241

**THEME:** Being thankful should be a way of life.

A fun little activity with some raw poultry will launch a talk about how Thanksgiving is more than a holiday. It should be a way of life.

### The Very Best VACATION Devotions

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## 43. Road Trip: Lose the GPS, Gain Direction 246

**THEME:** We need to learn to navigate the Christian life ourselves, not just rely on others.

We've become dependent on our phones to give us directions—everywhere. The next generation has lost the ability to navigate by using road maps. So let's take one day to lose the GPS and use the maps. And we'll see how that ties in spiritually: too often we sit in church and let the leaders do our navigating instead of learning to do it ourselves.

## 44. Ocean Shore: Tide Chart 252

**THEME:** As Christians, we want to have a reputation for being reliable and dependable.

A quick check will give you the high-tide and low-tide times for whatever coastline you're visiting on whatever date. We'll use that to dive into a quick lesson about the benefits of being dependable.

## 45. The Beach: Washout 256

**THEME:** True Christians can't stop at just knowing the Word. They need to put it into practice too.

A big bucket and a beach are all you'll need for this one. The kids will build a sandcastle with your help. Then you'll douse the thing with water and wash it away. This will lead to a talk about the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24–27 . . . and the importance of not just knowing the Word but putting it into practice.

## 46. Trail Hike: Trailblazing 261

**THEME:** Staying on God's paths—and the risks if we don't.

When we leave the trail and make our own path, often we risk getting lost—and worse. The Christian life is similar. The Bible gives us some paths to stay on, and if we leave them, we put everyone at risk.

## 47. Night Sky in the Country: Blinded by the Light 266

**THEME:** Remembering how amazing God is and how much he cares for us.

Seeing stars in the night sky should remind us how amazing God is—and how much he cares for us. It will also launch a tiny lesson about how we can be stars to guide others to God too.

## 48. Farmlands: Future Harvest 272

**THEME:** God can grow us so that we're a help to countless others.

A farm may not look like much, but out of that dirt a good farmer can grow enough food to feed thousands of people. We may not see our lives as being worth much more than dirt, but in God's hands he can grow us so that we're a help to countless others.

## 49. Mountains/Hills: Where Does My Help Come From? 276

**THEME:** The powerful God we serve has promised never to leave or forsake us. He's there for us when we need him most.

Sometimes a good look at some mountains or hills is all the reminder we need that we serve a powerful God—and he's given us a solid promise never to leave or forsake us.

## 50. Florida Everglades or Lakes/Swamps: Below the Surface 281

**THEME:** Checking in with God before we jump into any situation—no matter how fun or harmless it looks.

You may not see alligators on the surface, but some say every body of water in Florida has them. Even if you don't see a gator—you'd definitely think twice before jumping into the water. And that's the way life is too. Before we jump into any situation, no matter how fun it looks, it makes sense to look for hidden dangers and unexpected consequences.

## 51. Theme Park: Good Things Come to Those Who Wait 288

**THEME:** Patience pays off.

Waiting in line for a great ride may not be fun, but it pays benefits. When you suggest the family bails out of line—right when you're really close to the ride—you'll likely meet with all kinds of protests. This will open the door to talk about the payoffs to being patient.

## 52. Theme Park: Life Lesson from a Theme Park Ride 293

**THEME:** Making someone else's day a little bit better doesn't take long, but it means a lot.

Take the kids on the best coaster in the park. Even though the actual ride is short, they'll be talking about it all day. Sometimes that's how it is in life. It doesn't take long to make someone's day a little bit better . . . but they won't soon forget it!

## *A Quick Key for Parents*



Activities with this symbol are a little more on the dangerous side and will require some extra caution on your part. Additional safety tips and reminders are also included in these lessons.

# INTRODUCTION

## *Why This Is So Important*

Don't pet rattlesnakes.

Don't drive a car while blindfolded.

Don't walk down a dark alley with a wad of cash in your hand.

Don't chum the water with dead chickens before taking an ocean swim.

These are ridiculous examples of things we'd never do—because we know better. Any one of those could end with a deadly outcome. But here's a couple more examples that are even more dangerous because they have eternal consequences.

Don't leave all the spiritual training of your kids to the church.

Don't let learning about God be something that bores your kids.

You probably have a pretty good idea that the Bible tells us, especially in the book of Deuteronomy, to teach the next generation about God and the principles he's given us to live by. But why don't



we do that? One big reason is that we truly don't understand the reasons for the command.

Take a look at these verses from Psalm 78, where we get the “why” behind teaching our kids about God.

We will not hide them from their descendants;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,  
his power, and the wonders he has done.  
He decreed statutes for Jacob  
and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors  
to teach their children,  
so the next generation would know them,  
even the children yet to be born,  
and they in turn would tell their children.  
Then they would put their trust in God  
and would not forget his deeds  
but would keep his commands.  
They would not be like their ancestors—  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
whose hearts were not loyal to God,  
whose spirits were not faithful to him. (Ps. 78:4–8)

This passage gives a nod to the Deuteronomy passages (“he commanded our ancestors to teach their children”) and then goes on to explain the reasons it’s so critically important to teach our kids about God at home. Check out the four positive payoffs.

1. **So our kids will know God’s commands—the difference between right and wrong.** See that in verse 6? “So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.” If we don’t teach

our kids, they won't know. They'll make mistakes. Get hurt. And a scary thought? The truth can be lost in one generation if parents fail to teach their kids.

2. **So our kids will trust God for salvation, of course. But also so that they'd learn to trust him and his ways, knowing God's ways are the best ways.** There it is, right in verse 7: "Then they would put their trust in God."
3. **So our kids will obey God.** Verse 7 again: "Then they would . . . keep his commands."
4. **So our kids will not forget God.** Verse 7 addresses this as well. "Then they would . . . not forget his deeds."

These four payoffs are huge. Massive. And they are all about protecting our kids, aren't they? That, my friends, is a huge motivator to lead family devotions.

As a parent, you're wired to protect. You'd jump in front of a car to save one of your kids, right? Of course you would. You'd die for them. But how far will you go to *live* for them? Will you take a chance with family devotions and change your habits a bit to carve out time for this? So your children will know God's truth. So they'll trust God. So they'll obey God. So they don't forget him. Failure always follows forgetting God . . . and none of us want this for our kids.

Family devotions are all about protecting our kids. We safeguard our kids from the lies of this world by giving them regular doses of truth—in the most appetizing way possible. So give this a try, will you? Protect your kids by teaching them about God, and do it in creative ways where they'll really listen. The church can help, but let's face it: your kids only spend an hour or so there a week. It just isn't enough. They need you to help them. To show them the way. You're the one who is there for your kids at all hours of the day or night, not the church. You can do this . . . and I want to help.

## LET'S MAKE THIS EASY

**You don't have to follow any order in this book.** Pick devotionals that are right where your kids are at . . . or need to be. Whenever you do a devotional, jot the date in the margin next to the title in the table of contents. That way you won't repeat one unintentionally.

**If you're having fun, the kids will too.** Make devotional time with the family a positive experience. Yes, learning about God is serious, but you want your kids to grow up feeling that learning about God can be fun too. These devotionals aren't intended to be the type where everyone sits around the kitchen table without saying a word. Grab a snack for the kids and encourage interaction. And if they're getting loud or laughing, don't worry about quieting them down. They're still going to catch the point of the lesson, and the experience will be better for everyone!

Tim

## BORROWING SUPPLIES IS A GOOD THING—IF YOU DO IT RIGHT

There will be times you'll read the list of supplies needed for a lesson and find you're short one or two essential items. Often, you'll find you can buy what you need easily and pretty cheaply. But other times you may want to borrow from family, neighbors, or friends.

There are some subtle and important advantages to borrowing that go way beyond saving money. First, borrowing opens a door of opportunity to give a word of witness to a neighbor or coworker. Or it can be a bit of encouragement to a Christian who may need to start teaching their own kids important nuggets of truth from God's Word. Second, you'll be explaining why you need the item. You may even invite the lender to join you for the little devotional time with your family so they can handle the tool or whatever it is instead of you. You'll appreciate the help. They'll appreciate feeling needed. And who knows what might happen from there.



There are three simple rules you must follow when borrowing—and they're important. These are cast in concrete, my friend. Get these three simple things right, and you'll earn respect. Miss on any

one of them, and you won't be borrowing from that person again anytime soon.

1. **Return the item—*fast*.** Not when you see them next. Not when it's convenient for you. Make the effort and get whatever you borrowed back to them pronto, even if they insist there is no rush to return it. And bring the item to them. Don't ask them to come to your place.
2. **Return the item in *better condition* than you got it.** Wipe the item down. Clean it up. Coil the cord up neat and use a Velcro tie to keep it that way. If you borrow a tool with a power pack, return it fully charged. Is it gas powered? Return it with the tank full—even if you didn't use much or it was nearly empty when they loaned it to you. This is about showing you value their stuff and the chance to borrow it.
3. **Return the item with *gratitude*.** A friend who has just the thing you need at just the time you need it is a bit of a hero, don't you think? Treat them like one. Give them a big thanks. Show them a picture of you using it with the kids. Tell them how great it worked—which makes them feel smart for having it in the first place. Bring them coffee or a donut, or maybe return the tool with a bow around it, for Pete's sake. You're creative, or you never would have bought this book. Use a bit of that creativity to make the lender feel really good that they helped you out.

The three rules are easy, right? You can do this. And you'll be creating a good reputation for yourself—and being a good witness as you do.



# Money to Burn

**THEME:** We can trust God when we're in a tough spot and the heat is on.



## THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Isopropyl rubbing alcohol (70%), available at any pharmacy*
- Empty glass*
- Measuring cup (in ounces)*
- Salt, ½ teaspoon*
- Pair of tongs*
- Lighter (a stick lighter is best)*
- Safety glasses, one pair for each of the kids—and for you too*
- \$1 and \$20 bill*
- Bucket of water (just in case)*

## Advance Prep

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You're going to be working with fire on this one, so keep that in mind when you're choosing a spot to do this. I'd suggest doing this outside the first time. You'll also want to have a bucket filled with water nearby, just for an added measure of safety. Over the kitchen sink or bathtub works well too. Just stay clear of curtains, okay?

1. Put on your safety glasses.
2. Use the measuring cup to measure out 3 ounces of rubbing alcohol. Pour it into the glass. Put the cap on the bottle of rubbing alcohol and move it out of your way.
3. Next, measure out 1 ounce of water. Pour it into the same glass with the rubbing alcohol.
4. Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt to the glass. Mix well with the rubbing alcohol and water.
5. Now use the tongs to stuff the \$1 bill into the alcohol solution. Be sure the bill gets completely soaked. I'm suggesting you use the \$1 bill here to build your confidence a bit. When you do this with the kids, the \$20 bill will be much more impressive.
6. Once you're certain the entire bill has been soaked, use the tongs to remove the bill from the glass. Lift it by one corner, if possible. By doing it this way, the bill will be in a perfect position to light. Wipe up any drips of the alcohol solution that may have pooled below the bill.
7. Move the glass with the rubbing alcohol solution far from where you will be lighting the dollar bill. Have that bucket of water handy if you're not doing this over the sink or tub, just in case something doesn't go exactly right.
8. Hold the top edge of the bill by the tongs—and at a slight angle away from you if possible. Fire travels up, so you don't want

your hand in the path of the flame. Light the bottom corner of the bill with the stick lighter.

9. The bill should become enveloped in flame but remain undamaged itself. The flames should go out by themselves, leaving a perfect bill behind.

Isn't this a great experiment? Now you're ready to do it with the kids . . . but with a \$20 bill this time!

### **Running the Activity**

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I'd have the alcohol solution already in the glass. Gather the kids up, have them put on their safety glasses, and get started. If your kids have their own stash of money, consider asking them to give you a \$10 or \$20 bill. That may increase their interest in the experiment just a little bit.

Go through the procedure as you practiced it, having the kids do as many of the steps as you feel they safely can based on their ages and level of responsibility. The more they do, the more deeply the lesson gets etched in their heads.

Once the flames have engulfed the bill and then been extinguished, you're ready to move on.

### **Teaching the Lesson**

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Something valuable, namely the \$20 bill, was at stake here. If one little thing didn't go perfectly, that money would have been gone. And sometimes we face situations like that in life. We may feel something bad is going to happen unless everything goes just right.

In Daniel 3 we have the story of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow down to the pagan



king's image. The penalty was death—by means of a very nasty fiery furnace.

Something valuable was definitely at stake here: namely, their lives. The king gave them one more chance to bow down. Listen to their answer here. The level of trust Daniel's friends had in God was fantastic.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Dan. 3:17–18)

These men trusted God. They knew he was capable of rescuing them. But even if his plan meant they were to die, they committed themselves to remain loyal to God.

When the heat is on and we are in trouble, under pressure, or facing hardship or nasty people, or when we face a culture that is increasingly hostile to genuine Christians, that is when we often find out just how real our faith in God is.

Do we really trust him?

Will we follow him, even if he doesn't answer our prayers the way we hope?

Hard times often reveal where our faith is at. And if we see our faith isn't all that it should be, we can ask God to help us with that.

## Summing It Up

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When we dipped the bill in rubbing alcohol and took out the lighter, it definitely must have looked like that money was going to go up in

smoke. But you trusted that I'd get that money back to you, or pay you back another way, right?

Sometimes things look dark. Bleak. Like we're in a tunnel and there is no light at the end of it. Let's trust God, even though we don't see a solution. God often works in unexpected, unpredictable ways. Like the flaming \$20 bill that was unharmed in the fire, or like Daniel's three friends, we can be rescued by God. But even if he lets the hard times continue for us, we must hang on all the tighter to him.

My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me. (Ps. 63:8 ESV)

This is true in both the good times and the hard. When we are facing fires, this verse reminds us of the need to cling tight to God, knowing he is holding us the whole time.

Remember, God has a way of doing the unexpected, at just the right time.

You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;  
my God turns my darkness into light. (Ps. 18:28)



# Gone Forever

**THEME:** When we ask God to forgive our sins, they are gone forever . . . never to be resurrected. That should make us grateful enough to do that for others.

## THINGS YOU'LL NEED

- Smooth-surfaced rocks.* They should be about the size of the palm of your hand so you have enough room to write on them but not so large that they're hard to throw. Likely you can find rocks like this outside somewhere, perhaps on the shore of whatever body of water you choose to do this. You can also check with a pet store. Often, they have bags of smooth river rock meant for aquariums that work perfectly for this.
- Permanent marker* (to write on the rocks)

## Advance Prep

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Find a good spot on the shore of a lake, river, pond, or ocean. A pier works terrific too. And be sure you have plenty of rocks for the kids to write on and throw. The rocks will need to be clean and dry before you can write on them.

## Running the Activity

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1. Ask the kids to think about their sins . . . things they've done wrong but maybe haven't confessed yet. Or it could be something they did long ago, and they may have confessed it, but they still feel bad whenever it comes to mind.
2. Now have them use the marker to write that sin on a rock. Once that is done, ask them to throw it into the water, as far from shore as they can. You may want to demonstrate the first one. If the stones are flat, you may even skip some of them across the water.
3. Have them repeat this procedure as many times as they want.
4. Once they've hit a lull and seem to be out of ideas, you may want to take this a bit further. Now ask them to write ways that others have sinned against them. It could be friends, family, or really anybody. Ask if they're willing to forgive those who did them wrong. If they are ready to forgive, have them throw those rocks out into the water too.

Don't take too long on this before moving into the teaching time.

## Teaching the Lesson

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In Micah, a book in the Old Testament, there is a verse describing how God will forgive the sins of the nation of Israel. It gives us a great bit of insight into God's nature when it comes to how he forgives.

You will again have compassion on us;  
you will tread our sins underfoot  
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.  
(Mic. 7:19)

That word picture of hurling iniquities, or sins, into the depths of the sea is important. Think about how deep the ocean is, and picture God throwing our sins there.

- So deep, they will never surface again.
- So deep, nobody will ever find them.

That is the magnificent forgiveness he offers us when we confess our sins to him. The sins are gone. He won't dig them up again and shove them in our faces. When God forgives, it is complete. Sure, there are still consequences for our sin. If we rob a store we may go to jail—even though God forgives if we ask—right? But when God forgives, he definitely takes away the eternal punishment we deserve for that sin. That's huge! We need to let the reality of that sink in a bit. That truth should prompt some very important reactions in us.

- We should be filled with joy that our sins are forgiven, and we should love God more.
- We should be grateful that he has forgiven us so completely and desires we live in obedience to him.
- Out of that gratitude for what God did for us, we should be more willing to forgive others in the same way God forgives us.

## Summing It Up

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For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.  
(Ps. 103:11–12)

When we ask God to forgive our sins, he removes them from us completely—as far as the east is from the west. He hurls them into the deep water, never to be seen again, like those rocks we just threw. Let's be sure we're living in gratitude for God's great gift of forgiveness . . . and forgiving others the same way.

*If the kids weren't ready to forgive someone who had wronged them earlier, check back to see if anybody is ready to throw another rock into the water now.*



# Minute to Win It

**THEME:** We only become effective with some elements of the Christian life (like trusting and obeying God) with practice.

## THINGS YOU'LL NEED

Pretzel diving game

- Bowl of mini pretzel twists or rings*
- Set of chopsticks*
- Timer*

Dizzy mummy game

- Roll of toilet paper for each of the kids*
- Bike helmet*
- Timer*

Cup hands game

- Pair of plastic 16-ounce "Solo" style cups* for each of the kids
  - Dice*, ten pair
  - Timer*
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## Advance Prep

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Pick up supplies for one of the games above, or all three if you'd like. The games are quick, and if you can do more than one, it may help drive home the theme of the lesson just a little bit better.

## Running the Activity

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Choose one or more of the games above and play them with your kids. Here's how each one works.

*Pretzel diving:* With a chopstick between their teeth and their hands behind their back, each contestant has one minute to spear and line up as many of the mini pretzel twists from the bowl as they can on their chopstick. The one with the most pretzels on their chopstick wins!

*Dizzy mummy:* Each contestant clips on the bike helmet and holds the loose end of a roll of toilet paper while you spindle the roll on your fingers. Then they spin around as fast as they can until they've emptied the roll completely. The mummy who uses up the entire roll in the shortest amount of time wins! Do be careful that they don't get so dizzy they fall and get hurt, okay?

*Cup hands:* If you can have two of the kids go at the same time, that can be more fun. If not, just do this for time. Each contestant must wear a pair of cups on their hands and use these "cup hands"



to stack dice on top of each other. The one with the tallest dice tower when the one-minute timer rings wins.

## Teaching the Lesson

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*You've run the games and congratulated the winners. They may want to play again or get another chance to better their score. That's a great idea—but wait for all encore performances until after you've taught the lesson. If you don't, the kids could lose interest in the activity, and it will be that much harder to get them involved in the teaching time. Assure them they can have another try once you're done talking about things.*

Let's start with two questions.

How many of you have ever done one of these activities before?  
If I gave you time to practice, do you think you could have done better?

Yes, practice likely would have made a big difference. That's the way it is with just about anything in life. Practice will help you get better and better at whatever it is you're doing. It's that way with playing an instrument, playing sports, and just about any skill or craft you can imagine. Practice is important.

And the same is true about our Christianity. There are certain things that come easier with practice.

Do you think your faith would be stronger—and there when you need it—if you practiced trusting God more often with the little things?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;

in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5–6)

Do you think you might stress or worry less if you practiced giving your cares to Jesus more—and practiced reminding yourself more often that he truly cares for you?

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:7)

Do you think you might be better at staying on the path God has for you if you made a regular practice of reading God’s Word?

Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path. (Ps. 119:105)

Do you think you might have an easier time believing this verse if you actually made a deliberate effort to practice honoring Mom and Dad regularly?

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” (Eph. 6:1–3)

What other aspects of the Christian life would likely come much easier if you practiced them?

The truth is, I can’t think of one area of our Christianity that wouldn’t be more effective if we practiced doing the right things more often than we probably do.

## Summing It Up

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As we practice living the way God instructs us to in the Bible, it will become more and more natural for us to do the right things. Isn't this how we develop good habits?

And in many places, the Bible makes this one thing I'm about to say very clear. Ready? Here it is: It isn't enough to simply know what God's Word says. We must put it into practice.

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word. (Ps. 119:9)

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:22–25)

“They will be blessed in what they do.” That sounds like a really good thing, doesn't it? How might life be better if we put God's Word into practice?

### *A Special Word for Parents*

If you want a little extra fun, pull up YouTube and check out the “Dude Perfect” team. They do some really crazy things—make one-in-a-million shots that only happen with lots and lots of practice. Check out this link in advance and see if this might be a way you can really drive the point home at the end of this devotional. Practice takes time and effort . . . but the end results? Totally worth it! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE2FsgKoGD04>