

FAMILY MATTERS



Read-Aloud Stories of
Responsibility and Self-Discipline

Andrea Schwartz

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Chalcedon/Ross House Books
Vallecito, CA

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Vallecito, CA 95251

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ISBN 978-1-89-137560-6

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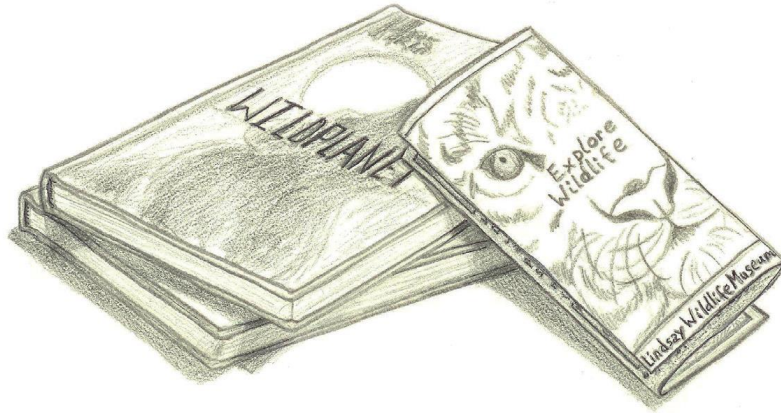
2 Corinthians 4:8-18

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A Better Offer

Hunter ran to his mother with the big news, “Miss Patti wants to take me to the Lindsay Wildlife Museum some Saturday as a birthday present and so that you and Daddy can have a day to yourselves! I can go, can’t I, Mom?”

Mrs. Faraday smiled, “Sure thing, Honey. We will pick a Saturday when your dad is off from work.” Hunter ran to find Miss Patti and brought her back to talk to his mom.

“Hunter tells me that you have extended a very generous offer to our family. Thank you so much. My husband only gets one weekend off a month, and it will be nice to plan a special day.”

“I know that you don’t have relatives living close by and I just love to spend time with Hunter,” she replied. “Just say when and I’ll put it on my calendar.”

That night Mr. Faraday checked his schedule and reported that his next weekend off was the third Saturday in October. Hunter called Miss Patti to see if the date would work for her. It did. Hunter grabbed a red marker from the drawer, ran to the calendar in the kitchen and circled that date. He also circled every day leading up to it.

“I understand why you circled that Saturday, but what good does putting a circle around every day before that do?” his dad asked, laughing.

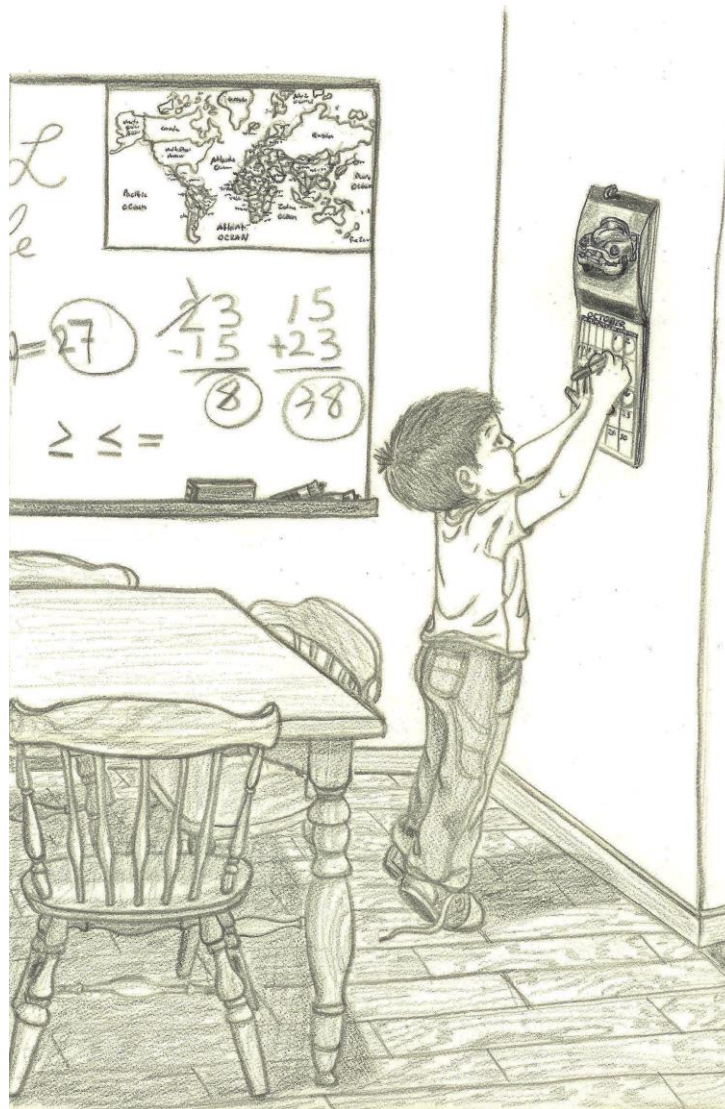
“I want to remember to get excited. Miss Patti says that they have some really cool snakes and bug exhibits. Too bad you can’t come too, but you have to go out with Mom.”

It was hard for Hunter to talk about anything else for the next couple of weeks. During his homeschool lessons, his mother focused on the wildlife that he would see at the museum. It wasn't difficult at all to keep his attention on that topic. But it was difficult getting him to put those books down and work on other subjects. Every time his mother told him it was time to work on his arithmetic, he would reply, "But, Mom, this wildlife stuff is educational!"

The following Sunday after church, Hunter gave his mom an envelope that his friend Heather handed to him. It was an invitation to her birthday party. Mrs. Faraday slipped it into her purse and didn't think about it again until Hunter began to talk about his birthday gift from Miss Patti. "Hunter, please grab my purse and bring it to me. I forgot to read Heather's invitation."

"Heather told me, Mom, that there is going to be a clown at her party," reported Hunter as he tossed the bag in her direction. "Please read it out loud."

Mrs. Faraday read, "Come to Heather's party. Saturday, October 16th from 1:00-4:00 pm." Hunter jumped up, grabbed his favorite marker, and ran to the calendar to circle the date.



“Oh, no!” he said in a disappointed tone. “Now I won’t be able to go to the Wildlife Museum!”

“Is it the same date?” his mother queried.

“Yes. I’ll have to call Miss Patti and tell her I can’t go.”

Mrs. Faraday got up and brought Hunter to the couch. “You will not be calling Miss Patti to tell her you can’t go. You just can’t go to Heather’s party.”

“But, I have to go. The invitation said, ‘Come to my party!’ It means I *have* to go.”

Mrs. Faraday smiled, “No that just means she’s invited you. It isn’t a command.”

“But, I want to go to the party. I can go with Miss Patti any time.”

Mrs. Faraday took a deep breath. “Hunter, you will have to decline the invitation to Heather’s party. Obviously, you can’t go to both events, and you have to honor the commitment you made to Miss Patti.”

“Mom, I’m sure she’ll understand. Besides, Heather says that for her fifth birthday there is going to be a clown.”

Mrs. Faraday said, “Hunter, it would be rude and inconsiderate for you to cancel your day with Miss Patti. How would you feel if she called and told you that someone invited her to a party and she decided to go to that rather than take you to the museum as planned?”

Hunter bit his lip and answered, “I wouldn’t like that very much.”

His mother’s voice softened, “Aren’t we to treat others the way we wish to be treated? Didn’t you memorize a Scripture verse that dealt with that recently?”

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets, Matthew 7:12,” Hunter recited in a very low voice.

“You remembered that verse, Hunter. Well done. And you have correctly seen how it applies to this situation.”

“I wish I could do both,” he said in a hopeful tone. His mom just looked at him. “But, I guess that’s not possible, is it?”

That night Miss Patti called to speak with Mrs. Faraday. She had heard in Sunday school that Heather’s party was the same day as their planned outing. She explained that the only time she had available for the next couple of months was the sixteenth because she was going to be traveling for business. Before Patti could explain more, Mrs. Faraday interrupted her. “Yes, I know. In fact, I think Hunter would like to talk with you.”

Hunter said, “Miss Patti, I’m looking forward to going to the Wildlife Museum with you next Saturday. I’ve been studying about the animals and stuff and I’m even going to bring money to buy souvenirs.”

“But, Hunter, won’t you miss the party?”

“Yes, I will. But, you and I have planned this for a while and I don’t think they’ll miss me too much at the party,” he added.

“Well, I’ll see you on Saturday. Tell your mom I’ll call later in the week to nail down the time.” With that Hunter said good-bye and walked slowly back to the living room and picked up the invitation.

“Should I call Heather and let her know I won’t be coming to the party?” he asked.

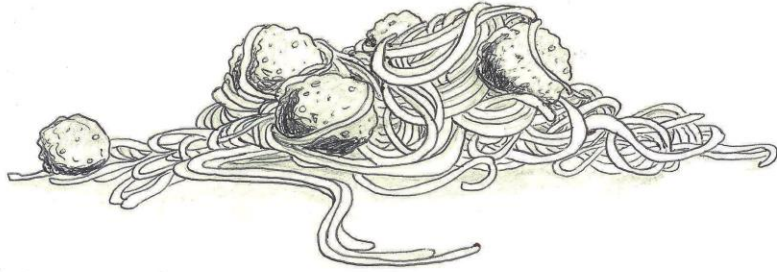
“If you want to, or, I could call and talk with Mrs. Stack if that would be easier.”

Hunter gave his mom a big hug. “Thanks, it would be easier. And, thanks for having me do the right thing, Mom.”

“You’re welcome, Hunter. You know you will face many circumstances like this in life. Keeping your word and following through with your commitments are not always easy things to do. However, if you get practice when you are young, it becomes a habit—to do what is right—even if you get a better offer.

“Now, what should your dad and I do next Saturday while you and Miss Patti are at the museum?”

Hunter winked as he replied, “Well, you guys *could* go to Heather’s party!”



Against His Better Judgment

Mr. and Mrs. Faraday were giving last minute instructions to their son before they left the car. “Hunter, make sure that you know where Shannon is at all times. If she starts getting cranky, have her lie down and go to sleep. This fundraising dinner shouldn’t last too late. We’ll be back to pick you up around 10:30.”

Hunter’s mom and dad were accompanying four other couples to a fancy dinner. He knew it was fancy because his dad was in a suit, and his mom looked especially pretty in her new flowery dress. As they made their way up the cobblestone pavement to the front door of the Devone home, the Benoit family was walking up the driveway with their teenaged daughter. Shayla Devone opened the door and had a big smile on her face. “Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Faraday. Hello Mr. and Mrs. Benoit. Come on in. Mom and Dad are just about ready.”

As they walked into the entry, the sound of footsteps echoed throughout the house. All six of the Devone children were at home, along with their two cousins, Greg and Peter Harper, whose parents were also going to the dinner. By the time the Benois made their way into the house, Mrs. Devone called all the children together in one location to give last minute instructions.

“Now, Hannah, you are in charge, but since you will have a full house tonight, Lucy took off work so she could help you out,” she said as she gave Lucy Benoit a big hug. “We’ve made spaghetti and meatballs and there’s enough for all of you to have seconds.”

“Gretchen, you certainly know how to cook for an army, that’s for sure,” Mr. Faraday teased.

All the parents found their respective children and gave them hugs as they were hurried out of the house by Mr. Devone who kept saying, “Hut, hut; we don’t want to be late.”

Hannah, Shayla, and Lucy gathered all the kids and began to portion out the spaghetti. There was so much chatter that it was hard to hear. The boys hurriedly ate their meal, and ran outside to play. Hunter asked Lucy to look after Shannon, which she was delighted to do.

Things were going along fairly well, until Hannah told her brother Gavin that he needed to clear the dishes from the table and put them in the dishwasher. Since he, Hunter, and the two cousins were in the middle of a close game of Monopoly, Gavin pretended that he didn't hear her. Rolling her eyes and giving a deep sigh, she turned and left the room. Gavin smiled and commented, "Works every time!"

About a half hour later, Hannah came back into the room and turned off the lights. "Hey, what's that about?" shouted Gavin.

"Mom and Dad will be back in about forty-five minutes. It's your turn to do the dishes. I'm not going to do them for you," Hannah snarled. "You'd better get busy."

Hunter, Greg, and Peter offered to help Gavin. When they walked into the dining room they could see that no one had put the left over spaghetti away. Hunter looked over the plates and commented, "I don't think you should save it at this point. It probably isn't good anymore."

"No problem. We'll just throw it down the garbage disposal." With that, Gavin took a clump of spaghetti and flung it at Greg, who promptly took some and shoved it down Peter's shirt. Hunter gave a nervous smile. He really didn't think he should start throwing the food around, but even Hannah and Shayla were laughing at this point, so he decided to join in the fun. Just as he grabbed a good-sized handful and tossed it at Gavin, Gavin ducked and the spaghetti hit the wall.

Everyone gasped. Shannon walked into the room and announced, "Hunter's going to be in trouble!"

Just then the phone rang. It was Mr. Devone saying that the dinner ended earlier than expected and they were on their way back. Everyone started to scramble and cleared the table while Hannah and Shayla grabbed some wet towels to clean the wall. Hunter was helping, but the stain just wouldn't come out. "Be careful not to tear the wallpaper," one of the girls cautioned. "We are in so much trouble, I can't even believe it."

By the time the grown-ups returned, the table had been cleared, the dishwasher was running, and all the kids were sitting in front of the TV watching a video. One of the parents asked what they did during the evening and everyone was quite eager to report about the Monopoly game the boys had played and the movies the girls had watched. Hunter was decidedly quiet. Mrs. Faraday motioned to her children to get their things.

Hannah went up and whispered something in her mother's ear. By the look on Mrs. Devone's face, Mrs. Faraday knew that something was not right. Before long the story of the spaghetti fight was divulged and when asked who threw the spaghetti on the wall, the girls said, "Well, actually, Hunter was the one who threw it."

Hunter's parents were horrified. Mrs. Devone assured them not to worry about it; she was sure she could handle it in the morning. They all said their "good-byes" and on the way home in the Faraday car, no one said a word. When they walked into the house, Mrs. Faraday put Shannon to bed and Mr. Faraday told Hunter that he was too tired to discuss the matter and they would talk in the morning.

Hunter didn't know what to expect, but he was glad that he didn't have to deal with his parents' punishment until the morning. He wasn't sure if they would be less angry then, but he was glad to have the confrontation delayed.



The following morning at breakfast, Mr. Faraday broke the silence. “Hunter, what you did last night was really bad. Not only did you damage the Devone’s property, but you embarrassed your mother and me. When we left you there, we imagined Shannon would be the one who would have to be kept in line, not you!”

“But, Dad, you don’t understand,” Hunter responded as he tried to hold back his tears. “I wasn’t the only one throwing spaghetti.”

“But, you were the one who threw it on the wall, were you not?” his mother chimed in.

“Yes, but...”

“No buts, Son. What on earth were you thinking?” his father asked. “How could you possibly imagine that throwing food in the Devone house was appropriate? Do we let you act that way here?”

“But, Dad, I...”

“Hunter, I am ashamed of you. You’re only making it worse by trying to make excuses for yourself,” his mother interjected. “Ted, what are we going to do about this?”

“Calm down, Jenna. Let’s allow Hunter to answer my question.”

“The boys and I had just finished Monopoly and we had to do the dishes because it was Gavin’s turn. He started it and Greg and Peter joined in. I first thought it was a wrong thing to do, but when everyone was laughing, I felt it was okay. I didn’t figure on it getting out of hand, or on the wall. Really I didn’t.”

Mr. Faraday spoke intently. “I believe you, son, but you have to admit things would have been much better had you gone with your first instinct. What good is having an informed conscience if you don’t listen to it? Just because other people do something is no reason to abandon your rules of conduct.”

Hunter just wished he could have those ten seconds back. He wished all this had never happened.

“Well, you are going to have to make restitution, that’s all there is to it,” his father continued. “Not only are you going to call the Devones and apologize to them for your actions and ask their forgiveness, but you will need to make up for what you did.”

“How am I supposed to do that? Buy them a new wall?” Hunter asked in all seriousness.

“No, I imagine by now they’ve handled the stain, but they may have to repaint that wall. I can’t say for sure. In any case, I will leave it up to your mom to find out the status of things and to arrange for you to go over there and do some work for Mrs. Devone to make up for the damage and her trouble.”

Hunter didn’t like the sound of this. Besides he wasn’t the only one who was wrong. The other boys threw spaghetti, too.

Mrs. Faraday could see the wheels turning in her son’s head. She knew him all too well and knew what he was thinking. “It doesn’t matter to us what happens to the other boys. You are our son and you are going to learn from this experience by applying the Biblical laws of restitution. Your dad can show you the Bible references.”

Mr. Faraday asked Hunter to get the family Bible from the den. Together they looked up references in the book of Leviticus and Numbers. Hunter listened as his dad described how normally in a situation like this someone would need to pay for the damages and then add one-fifth of the value to compensate the injured party for their trouble. He explained that Mom was on the phone with Mrs. Devone to determine the extent of the damage.

Mrs. Faraday returned from her phone call with a smile on her face. “Gretchen says that the stain came off the wall and the wallpaper didn’t tear. She said there were some stains on the carpet and Gavin has been working on cleaning it all morning. She says she understands that you were not the only one involved.”

Hunter was relieved. “I guess that settles that. I’m glad this is over.”

“No, Hunter, it’s not over. You are going to spend a day at the Devone house doing some jobs for Mrs. Devone. You are going to make restitution for your behavior and its results. Your mom will arrange to get you there sometime this week.”

The following Thursday, Mrs. Faraday dropped Hunter off at the Devone house at about ten in the morning. She had asked her friend to find jobs that needed to be done and she requested that Hunter have to do them all by himself. When he arrived, Mrs. Devone had a list prepared for him. He had to wash all the outside windows of the house and when he was done, he was to hose down the trash cans and then the driveway. He worked the entire day, only taking a short break for lunch. By the time his father picked him up at five, Hunter was exhausted.

On the way home, his dad asked, “So, Hunter, did you learn anything today?” hoping that his son had benefitted from the experience.

“At first I was really mad, Dad. Especially when I saw Gavin watching television while I was working. But, then I sort of got into the window washing. It was kind of cool being on that ladder and using that big squeegee. I stopped being mad and got to think about why God’s law includes restitution. It would have been easy just to say I

was sorry and ask for forgiveness. But, as I worked I got to thinking about what you said and how I should have followed my initial judgment. My arms are really sore. I don't think I'll be so quick to do something stupid like that again."

Mr. Faraday smiled. "That's God's law in action, Hunter. You know you will remember this well into adulthood because you learned that your actions cost you something, I'm really proud of you, son. As a matter of fact, this story reminds me of an incident that happened when I was just a bit older than you when my brother and I..." As he was about to finish his sentence, he was interrupted by the sound of Hunter snoring.



The Burden of Guilt

Shannon held her mother's hand while they stood in the checkout line in the grocery store. She was listening intently to the conversation occurring at the customer service booth. The store manager, with a very stern look on his face, was on the phone as a clerk stood by holding the arm of a tall boy.

"Stop staring, Shannon," her mother whispered. "He's embarrassed enough without you glaring at him."

Mrs. Faraday held Shannon's hand as they left the store jointly pushing the cart to their car. "That boy looked like he's in trouble, Mommy. Is he?"

"I'm afraid so. From what I could hear, he and a group of other boys were shoplifting. The others ran out. He's the only one who got caught."

Shannon looked perplexed. "I didn't see him lift anything, and there was nothing in his hands. Besides, don't we lift things off the shelf when we put them in our cart?"

"Honey, shoplifting is another word for stealing. That boy was taking items off the store shelf and eating them, never intending to pay. My guess is that the manager was on the phone to the police, or if that young man is lucky, to his parents."

"Are they going to send him to jail?" Shannon asked.

"I doubt it. But, I bet they are going to try to scare him enough so that he doesn't steal again."

Shannon was very quiet for the car ride home. After parking the car in the garage, her mother carried the bags into the house and Shannon helped put the groceries away. She pulled out a box of Band-Aids and asked her mom where she wanted them to go.

Mrs. Faraday let out a big sigh. She looked sad. Shannon didn't like it when her mother was sad.

"What's wrong, Mommy? Did I do something wrong?"

"No, Honey," Mrs. Faraday answered with a far away look in her eyes. "I just remembered something that happened a very long time ago when I was little."

"Was it bad?" asked Shannon who by this time had climbed up on a kitchen chair.

"Yes, it was. This box of Band-Aids reminded me of something that happened when I was about eight years old."

"What happened?" Shannon asked.

"Your Aunt Gerty and I were in the grocery store one day. Your grandma, our mom, told us we could go look at the book section. Back then grocery stores weren't like they are today. They were much smaller and there was a book rack near the back of this store. Gerty and I liked to look through the story books.

"There was a book called *Nurse Nancy to the Rescue* which was a story about a nurse who was always prepared to help people when they scraped their knees. In the back of the book were some real Band-Aids. When I was little I liked the way bandages smelled and I sometimes pretended to have a cut so I could get one. I had this great idea to use the Band-Aids out of the book so that I would have them at school in case anyone fell down in the playground during recess."

"That sounds like a nice thing to do," Shannon said as her mother sat down at the kitchen table.

"Sure, it sounded great, but I really just wanted Band-Aids of my own and not have to ask for them. We had plenty around the house, but my parents wouldn't let me waste them. So, I figured out a way to get my own supply. I knew my mother wouldn't buy the book for me, so I decided to take the bandages out of all the books."

"You mean you planned to take them without paying? That's stealing, Mommy!" Shannon's eyes grew very wide.

"It was worse than that, Honey. I convinced Gerty that she should help me take the Band-Aids out of all twelve books that were on the rack. She was only five at the time and since I said it was okay, she just went along."

"Did you get in trouble?"

“Well, not exactly. When we were about to leave, my mother saw that Gerty had a bandage on her hand. Mom knew that she didn’t have one on before we came into the store, and asked about it.”

“And you told her?” Shannon interrupted.

“I thought you wanted to hear the story?”

“I do, Mommy.”

“Then let me finish it.”

“So what happened?”

Mrs. Faraday smiled. “Well, Gerty got all flustered and just told Mom that she had taken it from one of the books. My mother was really angry and made her go up to the store manager and confess. Gerty got in trouble, but the strange thing is that she didn’t tell them that I had taken some as well.”

Shannon put her hand over her mouth and whispered, “Mommy, you didn’t get caught?”

“No, I didn’t. But I felt so completely guilty that when I got home, I went right into my brother’s bedroom and dumped all the bandages behind his radiator figuring that no one would ever find them there. I kept waiting all night for Gerty to say something, but she never did.”

“You let her take the blame for something you told her to do?” asked Shannon, almost ashamed of her mother.

“I’m afraid I did. I felt so guilty. I tried to convince myself that it was all just a misunderstanding and that Gerty would get over it. The whole thing bothered me for a couple of days, but as time went on and the incident faded in my mind, I forgot all about it.”

Shannon scratched her head and asked, “That’s it? That’s the whole story?”



“Not exactly. About a month later Paul was cleaning his room and found the Band-Aids behind the radiator. He put two and two together and realized what had happened. He called me into his room and told me that I was going to have to polish Dad’s shoes (which was his job) and do the dinner dishes for the rest of the week. I told him he was crazy, and then he showed me all the bandages. With a big grin on his face he said, ‘If you don’t, guess who is going to be in trouble?’”

“Well, I did his jobs for a couple of days until my mother began to be suspicious. She knew that I wouldn’t be doing his chores unless something unusual was going on. Finally, she cornered him and he told her everything, even pretending that he was doing all this to teach me a lesson.”

“I bet you got in trouble for stealing; didn’t you?” Shannon asked.

“Surprisingly enough, that was not what made my mother and father angry. They weren’t happy that I had shoplifted, but they were more concerned that I had let Gerty take the blame for something I had done, too. And, they were angry that I had hid the evidence, and that I was letting Paul blackmail me. That night both of us got in trouble. But, Paul got in more trouble than I did.”

Shannon interjected, “But, why? He didn’t steal anything— you did!”

“Dad and Mom explained that what he had done was worse, if you can imagine, because what he did was subvert justice. He should have told them when he found the stolen items rather than use that information to get me to do his work. What he did was defy the authority of the family by concealing the matter and using it against me. The Bible tells us to have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness, but to expose them. Paul should have exposed my sin and let my parents deal with me.”

Shannon’s mind went back to the boy at the store. “So, even though the boy at the grocery store got caught, he’s probably better off right now than the boys who got away.”

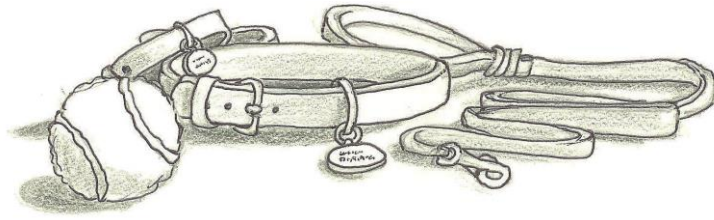
“Smart girl! Better to be corrected and repent, than hide your sin and live with the guilt.”

“Did Aunt Gerty ever forgive you?” Shannon asked.

“I really don’t remember much more about the whole situation, Shannon. I do remember how the guilt ate away at me. I spent so much time during those days wondering if I was ever going to be found out. Funny thing is that carrying that guilt was much worse than having the truth revealed. I don’t remember what my punishment was, but I do remember how awful I felt until everything was out in the open.”

Shannon climbed up on her mother’s lap and gave her a big kiss on the cheek. “What’s that for?” asked Mrs. Faraday.

“I hope that boy at the store has a mom as caring as you are. How about I put these Band-Aids in the medicine cabinet?” Shannon skipped down the hall humming her favorite hymn, “Amazing Grace.”



A Difficult Good-bye

Ever since Kenzie could remember she had a dog; Sierra was her constant companion. When Kenzie was about six years old, her older sister, Shannon, convinced her parents to let her buy a puppy which she named Annie. Both sisters enjoyed setting up obstacle courses in the backyard and running with the dogs pretending they were handlers in canine agility competitions.

The two dogs couldn't be more different. Sierra was a golden retriever and just wanted to please. The joke in the family was that if anyone ever broke in while they were away, the intruder would only have to speak nicely to Sierra and she would gladly accompany him home. Annie was obstinate and had little desire to make anyone happy. Many times Mr. and Mrs. Faraday regretted the day they agreed to let Shannon get the puppy. But in truth, everybody loved Annie, even though she could be difficult.

As Kenzie grew older and her life became busier, most of the time she spent with the dogs was when she fed them, cleaned up after them, or put them in their pens at night. They were always at the sliding door near the family room wagging their tails when she returned from her piano lesson, her golf practice, or church on Sundays. Sometimes she had them in her room as she did her school work during the day.

When Kenzie would go to golf tournaments with her mom, her dad would always give updates as to how the dogs were doing. He would joke and ask her what she'd eaten for dinner so that he could report back to the dogs. Once when Kenzie returned home after being gone for almost a week, Sierra was so excited to see her that she jumped up and banged Kenzie in the nose, causing it to bleed. Mrs. Faraday scolded the dog, but Kenzie wasn't mad. Although her nose hurt, she was glad to see how much her dog had missed her.

Kenzie was much younger than her older brother and sister and was very glad for her dog buddies when her sister moved out of the house. The Faraday family, which had numbered five people after she was born, was now down to three. Kenzie missed her older sister very much and had to get used to being an "only child."

One day the gardener left the side gate open and both Annie and Sierra escaped from the backyard. Kenzie and her mom were at the golf course practicing about a half an hour away. Mrs. Faraday's cell phone rang; it was the vet's office. Two women had found one of the dogs who had run to the local dog park. They called the veterinarian's office because Sierra was wearing a tag with the vet's phone number. They reported to the receptionist that although they had seen two dogs (a golden retriever and a little white dog) running together, the white one would not listen and ran away when they tried to corral her.

Immediately Mrs. Faraday and Kenzie gathered up the golf equipment and rushed to the car. Kenzie called and asked the woman if she would wait at the dog park until they arrived. Since Sierra was in good hands, Mrs. Faraday decided to first scour the neighborhood to see if they could spot Annie. All the way back Kenzie prayed out loud, "Please, God, help us find Annie and keep her safe." As they turned the corner on their street, there was their little white dog running in the opposite direction. It didn't take long for Kenzie to jump out of the car, call Annie, and retrieve the dog amidst tears, hugs, and many thanks to God.

They reached the dog park in a matter of minutes. Over and over Mrs. Faraday thanked the women for being kind and considerate. "We're dog owners, too," they said. "We'd want someone to do the same for our dogs."

"Mom, how did the dogs know to go to the dog park? Do you think they somehow knew where other dogs were?" Kenzie asked.

Mrs. Faraday, quite out of breath and exhausted from the stress of thinking about what could have happened answered, "I guess their God-given instincts took over and they had a sense to go in the right direction. I don't know if it is their sense of smell or their hearing, but they certainly went to the right place."

That night Kenzie told her father the story in detail. She became very worked up repeating how scared she was and all the awful things that went through her mind on the car ride home. "I thought we might never see Annie again. I was so scared. What if it happens again? We know she doesn't listen very well and next time we may not be so lucky!"

Mr. Faraday called the gardener and asked him to take special care to lock the gate securely after he mowed the lawn each Tuesday. He reassured his daughter, "Kenzie, Manuel said to tell you he is very sorry about what happened and promises it won't happen again."

Kenzie never took her dogs for granted after that. Whenever they needed to go to the vet, she always accompanied them, seeing them through injuries and illnesses. As the years passed, and her schedule became busier so she had less free time, she always made sure both of them got plenty of love before she put them to bed. Because she saw them everyday, she never really noticed that they had grown old. Sierra, the

golden retriever, now white-faced from age was almost completely deaf. Annie, although years younger, had numerous tumors that disfigured her face; she didn't listen any better than she had in earlier days. But their ailments never diminished Kenzie's love for her dogs.

One morning as Kenzie was feeding the dogs, she noticed bleeding coming from Sierra's mouth. The vet had prepared her for what was to come. He told her that Sierra at thirteen years of age had lived longer than expected for her breed and that her underlying cancer would eventually manifest itself with bleeding. Kenzie didn't want to think about life without her dog. She kept telling herself that Sierra still had a lot of years left. But her mom told her directly, "It's time we seriously consider saying good-bye to her."

Kenzie began to cry. Her dad, who was off from work that day, put his arms around his daughter and said, "Let's take the dogs for a walk." Together they leashed the dogs and left the house. Mrs. Faraday tearfully watched from the kitchen window. Kenzie tried to convince herself that her mom was wrong. Now wasn't the time to say good-bye.

They walked to the dog park, where the dogs had run years before. There were a number of dogs there that day. Rather than go inside, they stood outside the chain-link fence. Suddenly, all the dogs inside the fence came up and began rubbing noses with Sierra. Mr. Faraday commented, "It's like they know that she is very sick." As they made their way back, Mr. Faraday noticed that Sierra kept pulling the leash trying to get off the path. "Kenzie, see what she is doing? Dogs do that when they want to find a place to die. That happened with one of my dogs once."

Kenzie looked at her dad, "Do you think they were saying good-bye to her?" Mr. Faraday nodded; tears were streaming down his face. All the way home, Sierra walked proudly, as though she had just received a great honor from the other dogs. Mrs. Faraday was waiting at the front door. "Mom, I think we ought to call the animal shelter. Sierra knows it's time to go," Kenzie said trying to act bravely. Mrs. Faraday kissed her daughter and glanced at her husband, grateful that he'd taken that farewell walk with his daughter.



When they arrived at the shelter, Mr. Faraday filled out the paperwork; they decided that all three would accompany Sierra until the end. Kenzie still had a sense that maybe they were acting prematurely. The technician was very considerate and explained the entire procedure, letting them know what to expect. There was a peace that filled the room as they said their last good-byes. Just as they'd been told, Sierra looked like she had just fallen asleep after being given the sedative. Then the technician injected the dog with the medicine that would stop her heart. It all seemed to happen so fast. Kenzie felt as though she hadn't had enough time to really say her last good-bye.

On the trip back home, silence filled the car as each member of the family dealt with their sorrow individually. Finally, Mr. Faraday said, "I'm grateful God gave Sierra to us for as long as He did. She was a really good dog."

Kenzie took a deep breath. “I’m really concerned about Annie. I think she is going to miss Sierra a whole lot. What happens if...”

Her mother interrupted. “Let’s not think about that now.” But Kenzie couldn’t stop thinking about it. Annie already had some serious health problems, not to mention behavioral ones. Sierra had helped make Annie manageable. What would it be like for her now? Kenzie was determined to love her enough to keep her alive.

Within a couple of weeks, it was obvious that Annie was deteriorating fast. Missing her “big sister” was more than she could take. She kept digging everywhere—outside on the lawn and inside through the carpet—as though she was looking for her pal. Her behavior was so erratic that even Kenzie could no longer ignore it. After much anguish Kenzie came to the point that she was ready to say good-bye to Annie.

She and her dad repeated the trip they had made two weeks earlier, leaving Mrs. Faraday at home. Driving down the freeway, Mr. Faraday wondered how to tell his daughter that he didn’t think it was a good idea for them to be in the room with Annie as they had been for Sierra. When he finally brought up the subject, Kenzie reacted, “But, Dad, she needs to have me there.”

Mr. Faraday explained that Annie’s temperament, so different from Sierra’s, might make the experience more difficult. Kenzie wanted to fight to change his mind, but submitted to his wishes. The wait seemed interminable. What could be taking so long?

Finally, the man from the shelter came out and apologized. He said he’d never seen anything like it. Annie just wouldn’t lie down. No matter how much sedative he gave her, she continued to stand. Mr. Faraday and Kenzie glanced at each other knowing that Annie’s personality remained true to the end—stubborn. The tech allowed them into the room and they could see her on her side, her body still in spasm from the injection even though her heart had stopped beating. Although saddened, Kenzie was relieved to know it was over.

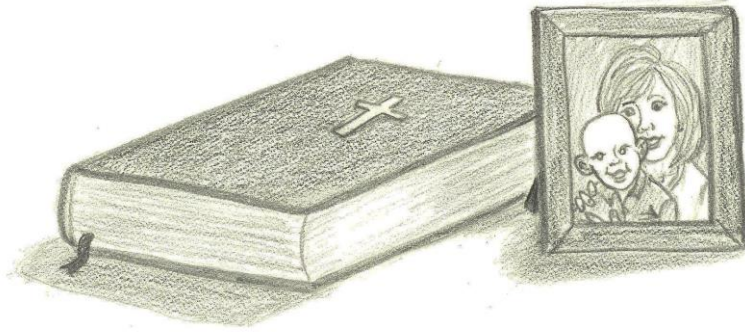
Days, weeks, and months went by before Kenzie could think of her dogs without being sad. Her mother’s words from the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes kept playing in her mind as she thought of Sierra and Annie:

*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;*

*A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

On the first anniversary of Sierra's death, Kenzie was talking to her mom. The pain of loss was less now and they both had some good laughs remembering funny stories about the dogs. Kenzie realized that there would be future times of sadness in her life when the people she loved would die. She was grateful that physical death was not the end for those that lived for Jesus. She wondered if dogs would be in heaven, but decided that since the Bible didn't talk about that she shouldn't spend too much time thinking about it. She did know that she could trust the same God who had given her two very special animals to love, and who kept His promises.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.



The Bald Ambassador

Kenzie was making breakfast when her mom came from the laundry room. “Do you know what day it is?”

Mrs. Faraday, half paying attention, answered, “It’s Tuesday.”

“That’s not what I meant, Mom. Do you remember that today is Michael’s birthday? He would have been twentythree years old.”

Mrs. Faraday got a far away look in her eyes. Kenzie knew it meant her mother was deep in thought. “No, I hadn’t remembered. You know I’m not one for remembering birthdays. But, I do remember the first day we met him.”

Kenzie had heard this story, but enjoyed hearing it again whenever the subject of Michael came up. “I was only three years old when we met Michael. I still remember most how he looked when he was bald. Even though he was a lot older, we were about the same size, and the age difference never seemed that much.”

Mrs. Faraday added, “He was much closer in age to Shannon than to you.” Kenzie dished out the oatmeal and they sat at the kitchen table eating breakfast.

“Hard to believe that a chance encounter began such a close friendship between our families,” Kenzie said, hoping her comment would spur her mom to share the story again.

“It’s called Providence, Honey. There was nothing chance about it. In fact, since I’ve related that story in talks I’ve given, I’ve come to appreciate how important an event it truly was.”

“In what way?” asked Kenzie.

“I had been very sick that fall and had spent a lot of time in bed. I was so tired of being sick. I volunteered to find performance venues for the homeschool choir. I made most of the calls months before and had lined up a number of locations and dates for the performances. Because our good friends, the Martins, had been treated so well at the Ronald McDonald House when their daughter was born prematurely, I thought I would schedule one of the choir performances at the Ronald McDonald House near us.”

Mrs. Faraday chuckled. “You probably don’t remember, but long after I was better, my cough was still so awful sounding. I wasn’t sure I should go to the performance—not because I was contagious, but because I was afraid my coughing would disrupt the singing.”

“I remember that day,” Kenzie interrupted. “You left me home with Hunter. I really wanted to go, but you said I had to stay home because it would be hard to keep an eye on me.”

Mrs. Faraday continued, “I took my cough drops and Shannon and I met the other choir members at the Ronald McDonald House that Thursday afternoon. All through the performance I could see a woman sitting next to a boy with a cap on his head and a mask over his nose and mouth. He was obviously a cancer patient. With every Christmas carol the choir sang, more tears would run down the woman’s face. I had this very unusual sense that God wanted me to talk with her, but I couldn’t just walk across the courtyard in the middle of the singing.

“When the performance was coming to an end, I decided to position myself to be where she would likely exit. Of course, I didn’t expect Ronald McDonald and Santa Claus in a sleigh with live reindeer to block my way. Suddenly, there were hundreds of people and I was convinced that I wasn’t going to be able to do what God had directed me to do.”

Kenzie could appreciate parts of the story that had gone over her head when she was younger. “Mom, did you actually hear God’s voice?”

“I can truthfully say, yes and not exactly. It was like hearing His voice, but it was much more like an urge within me. I knew I hadn’t come up with this on my own, because I really didn’t want to talk much and begin coughing.”

Kenzie interrupted, “I love the part where you finally met her and blurted out, ‘God wants me to talk with you.’”



“I thought it was a ridiculous way to introduce myself, but she smiled as though this was not unusual at all.”

Kenzie finished her breakfast and cleaned the dishes while her mom resumed doing the laundry. She went to her room and pulled out her photo albums and found pictures of herself with Michael. She recalled the stories her mom would tell about how Michael had a difficult time with the chemotherapy for his Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. She also recalled the story about the heart-to-heart talk her mother had with Michael once when he was being very disobedient.

Michael had to take lots of medications, some of which made him very agitated. His mom would often tell Mrs. Faraday how difficult it was when he acted badly. She couldn’t bring herself to discipline a child who had gone through so much. One time he had gotten so angry that he banged his foot into the glove compartment of their rental car and damaged it. His most serious offense was chasing his mother around

their rented apartment with a knife. It was after that that Michael's mom asked Mrs. Faraday for some help.

Kenzie's mom went to see them the next day. She asked to be left alone with Michael. Mrs. Faraday sat Michael down and put a Bible in his hands. "I want you to read the Fifth Commandment to me."

"Oh, I don't need to read it," he said. "I know it by heart."

Mrs. Faraday repeated, "No, I want you to read it to me."

Michael was always happy to show off how well he could read. "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"So, Michael," she continued, "I thought you were eager for God to heal you of your cancer."

"Of course I am. I pray for that every day."

"Read the Scripture to me again, would you?" Mrs. Faraday was determined to make a point.

"Okay. Honor thy father and thy mother. There I read it again."

"Keep going."

Michael sighed, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"Say that last part again, please."

Michael closed the Bible and answered, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"Michael, do you realize that when you disobey your mother and don't control yourself and get mad and break things and chase her with a knife that you are not honoring her?"

Michael nodded his head.

"Do you understand that if you are really praying that God would heal you, you are working against your own prayers by failing to honor and obey her?"

Michael's jaw dropped. "I never thought about it like that before. I do want God to heal me. But sometimes the medicines make me act crazy."

Mrs. Faraday took a deep breath. “You need to discipline yourself to overcome the effects of the medicine. God has promised to not give you anything He won’t give you the grace to handle. If you believe Him, you will be able to resist the temptation to behave badly.”

Michael smiled. He liked the idea that God would keep His promise and help him behave properly. Mrs. Faraday continued, “It is not an accident that you have cancer. I don’t know why God has ordained it, but He has. It is your job to respond in an obedient fashion. You know, the Bible says that you are an ambassador for Jesus Christ. If it wasn’t for the cancer, you wouldn’t be able to be a witness for Him right here at Packard’s Children’s Hospital.”

“I am an ambassador!” Michael liked the way that sounded.

For the rest of the time he and his mom were in California finishing the chemotherapy treatments, Michael took his role as an ambassador for Christ very seriously. When he was waiting for a treatment or a biopsy, he would often comfort other people in the waiting room, unashamedly sharing with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Once, when he was about to be put under anesthesia, he told the doctors that he hoped they knew Jesus and he’d be glad to tell them about Him when he woke up. His mother noted that she never had behavior problems with him after that.

Kenzie put all the photo albums back and went in search of her mom, who was paying some bills at her desk. She came up behind her and put her arms around her. Mrs. Faraday was surprised but grateful for the affection. “What’s up?”

“How about we go to the Ronald McDonald House soon and I sing for the families there—in honor of Michael. I may not be bald, but I sure can be an ambassador.”

Michael's Story

from <http://www.michaelsministry.org/>

During Michael Sottile's short life, he had several illnesses: a bad heart that required a new one; the diagnosis of cancer for which he received chemotherapy for fourteen months; two strokes, one that caused his face to drop and the second that left him with a limp; and lastly, a blood disease that opened the door to heaven for him.

Michael considered it a blessing to have had all four illnesses. Why? Because it enabled him to relate to others in need on four levels, instead of just one. He had discovered the purpose of his life. It gave him great joy to tell others that there can be peace in the midst of their sufferings.

Michael passed away at the age of 16. His favorite verse is inscribed on this tombstone—2 Corinthians 4:8-18 which reads:

We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who live are always given over to death because of Jesus, so that Jesus' life may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith in accordance with what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke, we also believe, and therefore speak, knowing that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and present us with you. For all this is because of you, so that grace, extended through more and more people, may cause thanksgiving to overflow to God's glory. Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

About the Author

Andrea Schwartz has written five previous books—*Lessons Learned from Years of Homeschooling*, *The Homeschool Life*, *The Biblical Trustee Family*, *Woman of the House*, and *Teach Me While My Heart Is Tender*, which is her first book in this read-aloud series.

Andrea devotes much of her time and energy writing and lecturing on the Christian philosophy of education, and works with both Christian schools as well as homeschooling parents as a consultant and mentor.

Andrea lives in California with her husband of 37 years. She is available for speaking engagements, consultations, or individual mentoring. Her website is www.WordsFromAndrea.com, and she can be reached at WordsFromAndrea@gmail.com.

About the Illustrator

Tara Sturlaugson is a native of South Dakota and a homeschooling mother of three. Along with a love for art, she enjoys singing and directing church choirs. She currently lives in San Jose, California, with her husband, Adam, and children Lydia, Geneva, and Levi.