

- THE -  
**GOSPEL**  
IN CHILDREN'S STORIES

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

*- Matthew 19:13-15*

What is your favorite childhood book? Do you remember a family member – mom, dad, a grandparent, a brother or sister, reading to you? Children's books are more than stories on a page. When we are little, they shape us, they teach us, and they encourage us to imagine and grow in knowledge. Have you ever heard a story and thought: There is a message from God in that story? This month, we're going to explore some classic children's stories and, with the help of stories from the Bible, find good news for us from God in those stories.

# The Gospel in Children's Stories

**JULY 3**

## **THE DAY THE CRAYONS QUIT**

**1 Corinthians 12:4-14**

In *The Day the Crayons Quit*, young artist Duncan has a problem: his crayons have sent him letters of resignation because they aren't happy with their place and use in his crayon box and artwork. Paul writes a letter to a church in Corinth where people are in conflict and are exploring what it means to be part of a church community together. What is the balance between our desires and gifts and the good of the community?

**The church is at its best when gifts are shared, individuals are valued, and everything is anchored in the love of Jesus.**

**JULY 4-9**

Monday	Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. What does it mean to be "united in mind and thought" (NIV) as followers of Jesus?
Tuesday	Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. What are the issues causing divisiveness in the church today?
Wednesday	Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. What gifts from God do you see in friends and family? What gifts of God do you see in your own life?
Thursday	Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Have you ever felt like your gifts didn't matter or weren't being honored? What made you feel that way?
Friday	Read Romans 12:3-16. How would you describe someone who produces unity and harmony in the way they live their life?
Saturday	Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Why does God need all of us, as the church, all sharing our gifts together?

### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Share a time when you witnessed a group accomplish something by sharing their gifts that couldn't have happened individually or without everyone working together.
2. In Corinthians and Romans, what does Paul teach about addressing division and conflict? What behaviors and attitudes does Paul encourage?
3. How does a follower of Jesus balance individual desire, gifts, and freedoms with the needs and common good of the community?
4. Duncan listens to the input of the crayons and offers a way to honor their feedback and use their gifts together. What do you think we, as the church today, can do to help overcome divisions and conflict in our culture and our communities?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Get out your crayons this week and draw a picture with someone – a family member, a friend, another church member. As you color, talk about how you have experienced God working through the gifts of God's people, and why it is important for God's people to overcome divisions and work together.

# The Gospel in Children's Stories

**JULY 10**

**THE DAY THE CRAYONS CAME HOME**

**Psalm 34**

In an interview about the book *The Day the Crayons Came Home*, Drew Daywalt says the theme of the book is about being rescued. Psalm 34, written by King David, reminds us when we feel lost, or broken, or defeated, to turn to God who promises to rescue us. What does it mean to be rescued by God, and how can we help God to rescue others?

**God rescues us, and invites us to help rescue others.**

**JULY 11-16**

Monday	Read Isaiah 46:3-4. What does it mean to be "rescued" (NIV) by God?
Tuesday	Read Psalm 34:1-7. How have you experienced or witnessed God saving, delivering, or rescuing you or someone you know?
Wednesday	Read Colossians 1:13-14. What does it mean to you that Christ rescues us from the "dominion of darkness" (NIV)?
Thursday	Read Psalm 34:8-14. How does the Bible encourage us to live in response to God's grace and deliverance in our own lives?
Friday	Read Ezekiel 34:1-6. How does the Bible say we can help others experience the rescue and deliverance God offers?
Saturday	Read Psalm 34:15-22. How are you sharing with others the promise God offers to hear us, stay close to us, and save us?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What comes to mind when you think of being rescued? Have you ever been rescued?
2. What does it mean to be "rescued" by God? Have you been rescued?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian suggested the world needs to hear an invitation to know a God of rescue. How are you sharing, or how can you share, that invitation?
4. At the end of the book, Duncan realizes the crayons are too damaged and broken to fit back in a box, so he builds a place where "each crayon would always feel at home." How can we be part of a church where everyone, no matter how broken or lost or hurting, can feel they have a "home"?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Each morning this week, read Psalm 34 slowly, pausing to take in each line or stanza. When you are finished reading, select one phrase that sticks out to you (i.e. "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted"). Repeat the line several times until it sticks with you, and then repeat it to yourself during the course of your day, watching for ways to share it or live it in your daily life.

# The Gospel in Children's Stories

JULY 17

STONE SOUP - Lucas

John 6:1-13

Do you know the folk tale and book, *Stone Soup*? In the tale, the "magic" of the stone soup isn't in the stones, but in the sharing of the townspeople and the resulting sense of community. In John's account of the feeding of the 5000, there is an interesting addition that isn't in the other Gospel accounts. According to John, while the disciples still can't see the possibility of feeding everyone, one of the disciples finds a boy who shares his loaves and fish. How can we let go of those things that limit our imagination and sense of possibility with God? How can we experience the power of God through our shared gifts? **The power of God is beyond our imagination when we share in community.**

JULY 18-23

Monday	Read John 6:1-6. What makes it hard to believe or trust the power of Jesus to do more than we can imagine doing on our own?
Tuesday	Read John 6:7-13. What role can our sharing and generosity play in what God is able to do for and among us?
Wednesday	Read Isaiah 58:6-8. What does a generous life look like?
Thursday	Read Luke 3:10-11. In what ways do you live a generous life? What holds you back from sharing or being generous?
Friday	Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-13. How have you experienced God's blessing or God's power in your life when you've shared or been generous?
Saturday	Ephesians 3:20-21. How have you experienced God doing more than the church can imagine through our collective, shared gifts?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What is your favorite children's book, or best memory of a childhood book?
2. In the story of *Stone Soup*, the people have to be tricked into sharing and offering hospitality. What keeps us from sharing more and living a more generous life?
3. In the story, the sharing doesn't just feed and offer hospitality to the strangers. It brings the entire community closer together in a new way. How have you witnessed sharing as a way to build and strengthen community?
4. The Bible says that through our sharing and generosity God can do more than we can imagine? Do you think that is true? What could that look like for our church?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Share a gift beyond your usual giving or tithe to the operating fund. Clay Church is creating a fund this month called the Stone Soup Fund. Any gifts made to the fund will support ministry that brings together and strengthens community, including our August picnic and a community-wide October "Be Kind" campaign.

# The Gospel in Children's Stories

**JULY 24**

## **THE KISSING HAND**

**1 John 4:13-18**

What do you do when you are afraid? What helps you face your fears? *The Kissing Hand* is a classic children's story about a mother raccoon helping her child face his fears. She invites him, in her kiss of his hand, to let love fill his heart and drive away any fear. For followers of Jesus, that message may sound familiar. 1 John 4:18 says, "...perfect love drives out fear..."

**Everyone needs to carry the promise that they are loved.**

**JULY 25-30**

Monday	Read Proverbs 29:25. What are your greatest fears?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 10:26-31. How do your fears hold you back? How do your fears keep you from living the life God wants for you?
Wednesday	Read 1 John 4:13-16. How do you know God's loving presence in your life?
Thursday	Read 1 John 4:17-18. In your experience, how can God's love "drive out" (NIV) our fears?
Friday	Read Deuteronomy 31:7-8. How can faith in God give you courage and strength in tough or difficult times?
Saturday	Read 2 Timothy 1:6-12. How can you witness to others of the power of Christ's love to cast away our fear?

### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What do you fear the most?
2. How is our society and our community driven and/or held back by fear?
3. In the story *The Kissing Hand*, a simple kiss on the hand reminded the young raccoon of his mother's love. What reminds you in any given moment of God's love and promise to be present with us?
4. Who has shared with you the power of the love of Jesus to cast out your fears? How did they witness to you of God's promised presence?
5. How can you help someone to know the kind of love that overcomes fear?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Each morning this week, read the first three verses of Psalm 46. During the day, when you are stressed or challenged, touch your palm to your cheek and think of God's loving presence.

# The Gospel in Children's Stories

**JULY 31**

**GREEN EGGS AND HAM**

**2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

*Green Eggs and Ham* is a fun and silly book, but what if we thought about Sam as a model for sharing the love of Jesus. Sometimes, people aren't in a place where they can hear or understand what you are telling them about Jesus. Sometimes, people don't want you to share with them about Jesus. But like Sam, what might happen if we are joyfully persistent in sharing what we know is right and good?

**We're called to be joyfully persistent in sharing the love of Jesus.**

**AUG 1-6**

Monday	Read Psalm 105:1-4. How have you experienced God at work for good in your life? Why is your relationship with Jesus important to you?
Tuesday	Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. What holds you back from telling other people about Jesus and the grace that comes from knowing Him?
Wednesday	Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15. What is the good news we have to share as followers of Jesus?
Thursday	Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. What does it mean to be an "ambassador" (NIV) of Christ in the world today?
Friday	Read Acts 20:22-24. What might it look like in our lives to make sharing the good news of Jesus our primary task?
Saturday	Read John 20:19-23. Who might Jesus be sending you to in order to share the good news of God's grace?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Have you ever shared your relationship with Jesus with someone? If yes, describe the experience? If not, why not?
2. Why do you think many people are afraid to talk about Jesus with others?
3. Why do you think some people don't want to hear about Jesus?
4. How could we, the church, share about Jesus in a way that is invitational and not threatening or off-putting?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** 1 Peter 3:15 instructs followers of Jesus to always be ready to share how they find hope in Jesus. Write down what a relationship with Jesus means for you so you are ready to share when the opportunity presents itself.