



EVERY DAY'S A HOLIDAY

By

Cal Habig

**Junior 3 Camp
Wi-Ne-Ma Christian Camp
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a registered student at Junior III camp at
Wi-Ne-Ma Christian Camp, June 29-July 5, 2008.**

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12899 SW Bradley Lane

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One

Brandon knew he wasn't supposed to be in the old barn. It was located on the most remote part of his grandparent's property and he had been told repeatedly not to venture inside of it.

Brandon's family had come to his grandparents for the fourth of July holiday. Brandon usually lived in Bayshore on the Oregon coast, but for holidays they often came to his mother's parents house here in the country near Sisters. Central Oregon was so very different from the coast. There were so many pine trees and no moss or ferns. There were still the forests, but the trees were a little farther apart and not so much undergrowth.

It was OK coming to Central OR, but he missed his friends Jasmine, Nick and Kayla; he missed his BMX bike and he missed his PlayStation games. He had asked his stepfather Bob if he could bring his Guitar Hero or Lego Indiana Jones games, but Bob absolutely refused.

As he stood at the entrance to the barn, he wondered why his grandparents had been so strict about keeping out. It just looked old and abandoned. It was all made of wood and, if it had ever had been painted, by now you couldn't tell. There were a couple of holes in the roof and the doors had long since been taken off and the hardware removed for other uses. There were a few rusty out of date tools hanging from the walls on the inside. These were just junk by now. The useable tools had been moved into the large metal shed that had been built back when Brandon's mom was a little girl. He had heard his grandfather say repeatedly that he needed to get the old barn torn down, but it just seemed like too big a job. There had been, Brandon had been told, an old house here near the barn, but it had burned down many years ago.

Brandon caught a glimpse of a big rake-like tool hanging on one of the inside walls.. He stepped inside so he could see it better. An old scythe. And...something perhaps for hitching horses. Many things that he could not identify. He moved slowly around the barn, being careful where he walked. He knew that sometimes snakes showed up in old barns like this and he was deathly afraid of snakes. There was a rickety ladder wooden leading up to the hay mow. (A hay mow is an upper level where the hay or grain for animals is stored.)

He was already inside and he wondered what it would look like from above and so he climbed the ladder. As he was six rungs up and was stepping on the seventh rung he reached out for the floor of the mow. As he touched it, the seventh rung beneath him snapped in two. Half of the rung went clattering down to the floor of the barn. His feet went flying and he lost his footing. For a brief second he was dangling just by holding onto the floor of the upper level with his hands and both legs flopping in thin air. Suddenly he caught his foot on the sixth rung again and brought both feet down on it.

He paused for a minute, breathing hard. If he had fallen and hurt himself, not only would no one know he was there, but when they found him, he would be in so much trouble...if he was still alive. As he stood there on the ladder, he scanned the hay mow for snakes. Nothing there. Brandon then turned and looked across the barn. He could see the wall on the other side. At that part of the barn, an inside room had been built and he could see on top of the ceiling of the inside room. There were assorted empty boxes and crates piled up there. It looked like at one point they had all been stacked up neatly, but at some time or other most of them had fallen over. He could see behind one pile of fallen crates there looked to be an olive green canvas bag. It was old and dusty. But it was an old canvas duffel bag.

After Brandon caught his breath, he knew he needed to get out of the barn. He moved down the ladder very carefully and then made his way outside. It was only when he was walking through the weeds back to the new house that he realized that both of his hands had several splinters on his palms. He slowed down his pace and worked to remove the splinters with his fingernails and teeth. He wasn't in a hurry to get back home, because he knew that his mom had gone to town with his grandmother and his step-brother and step-sister were there at the house with his stepfather.

In fact, when he entered the house, his stepfather snapped, "Where you been?"

"Just out walking around the farm."

"Don't you know you shouldn't be going off by yourselves. And look at you! Your clothes are covered with dust and dirt. There is dirt all over your hair. Go up to the bathroom and clean yourself up before your mother gets home. Timmy and Chrissy know better than that. They are never half the trouble you are."

As Brandon trudged up the stairs he thought sarcastically, *Yeah... 'Timmy and Chrissy'...they never do ANYTHING wrong in your eyes. No matter what I do, they ALWAYS do better according to you. If I get a "B" in school, you criticize me saying that I could have done better. When Timmy or Chrissy get a "B" you tell them how wonderful*

they have done and buy then a treat. When I wanted a new pocket knife, you gave me an old one with the little blade broken off you got at the thrift store. When Timmy wanted a new one, you bought him a brand new one still in the package from the gun shop.

Tim was six years old and Chris was an eighth grader. They spent most of their time with Bob and his mother. Bob's two children occasionally went to their natural mother's house, but there were problems there. He didn't know what kind of problems, but he knew they were serious and Bob and his mom had gone to court to have custody of Tim and Chris. He knew that his mom loved Bob, but she didn't seem to see how much he favored his own kids over Brandon. At least that was how Brandon saw it.

Later that afternoon Brandon's mother and grandmother returned from Bend. They had bought some new things, including a new pair of jeans for Brandon. His mother had also bought new boots for Tim and a western style blouse for Chris. The boots were black with bright white trim on them. As soon as he saw them, Tim squealed and dropped down to take off his shoes and put on the boots.

When Chris saw the blouse, however, she started to pout. "I don't like it. Take it back. It looks like something a

cowgirl would wear. Why can't you let me pick out my OWN clothes?"

"Yeah, Dianne," Bob chimed in. "Why do you have to pick out clothes for Chrissy? If you were going to buy clothes, you should have taken Tim & Chris along. They're old enough to pick out their own clothes, aren't you kids?"

Chrissy rolled her eyes as Brandon's mother, her lips pulled tight against one another, put the blouse back in the bag.

"I'll just take it back. If there is time, we will see if we can get Chrissy into Bend and let her pick out something she would like. I doubt, however, if we will have time. Tomorrow is the fourth of July and then Saturday we need to head back to Bayshore.

Bob looked at Brandon.

"Brandon. Don't tear the tags off of those jeans yet. If your mother doesn't have time to take Chrissy shopping she will need to take back your jeans as well. It's not fair for you to get something and not Chrissy. Why don't you just give them back to your mother and if she takes the blouse back, she can also take your jeans back."

"But Bob, Brandon really needs new jeans. He has outgrown almost all the ones he has. They come up way too high over his ankles."

“Brandon has jeans. When we are able to get something for Chrissy that she likes, then Brandon might be able to get new jeans.”

Brandon’s mother turned, her eyes moistening and went into the kitchen, carrying the bag.

Brandon noticed that nothing had ever been said about returning Tim’s boots. He already had them on and was marching up and down the stairs, clomping as he went.

At dinner that night, Brandon’s mother sat hardly saying a word. Bob helped Tim with his food, even though he didn’t need the help.

He’s going to keep Timmy a baby all his life, thought Brandon.

While they ate, Brandon’s grandfather began to reminisce about the war. He never told very gruesome stories, but occasionally he told stories of battles they had fought or things he had seen in Korea and Vietnam and Cambodia.

“Dad, I have never seen any medals from the battles you fought in. Didn’t you get any medals?” asked Brandon’s mother.

Brandon’s grandfather sat quietly for a minute with a sad look on his face.

“Oh I got medals, sure. But they are long since gone. I’m not sure what happened to them. I suspect that your

aunt Thelma hid them away as a trick on me, or at least she acted as if she did.”

“Aunt Thelma who died in the house fire?” Dianne asked.

Her father shook his head, yes, slowly.

“I’m sure that they were hidden somewhere in the house when it burned. Everything was lost. Your aunt Thelma and everything in the house. It was truly horrible. It seems to hurt the most on Independence Day. All of the other veterans dress up in their old uniforms and put on their medals and wear them at the bar-be-cue picnic before the fireworks. But I don’t have any. It would have been nice to have had them and wear them just once. But I suspect Thelma was playing an innocent trick on me. They were in my green army duffel bag. We never found any sign of it or any of the things in it when we cleaned out the ashes from where the house had been.”

Brandon thought for a minute. *Green duffel? Do you suppose that the bag I saw across from the hay mow was granddad’s duffel?*

What a great fourth of July gift that would be...to find his grandfather’s duffel bag and medals and let him wear them to the bar-b-cue tomorrow night.

For a second, he almost blurted out, “I know where the bag is! I saw it from the top of the hay mow in the barn!” But suddenly several thoughts came rushing at him. If he

admitted he had been in the barn, Bob would get all over him again. It would be another reason for him to put down Brandon. And, hey!, if he just showed up with the medals, he would be the hero. Even Bob would have to say something nice about him then.

But how could he get on top of that room in the barn without asking anyone's help. And could he do it without getting hurt?

The next morning, July 4, Brandon headed out from the house. Little did he know that this fourth of July would end much, much different from what he had expected.

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. Have you ever known someone who lost something very valuable to them? How did you want to help them?
2. Have you every wanted to be the hero like Brandon? Have you wanted to disobey your parents or grandparents in order to do so? Why or why not?
3. How do you think Chris & Timmy felt about the way their father treated Brandon? Why do you think that?

Two

Emily loved to go exploring with her dog Chipper. Chipper was a huge chocolate Labrador retriever. By huge, I mean that sometimes people mistook him for a small bear! He was fatter than most labs should be and so Emily would take him out to the pastures to run and give him exercise. They would take long walks together and explore. She had lived in the Camp Sherman area in central Oregon her entire life, but there was always something new to see or to explore.

But today she was not in any mood. Today her world seemed to be crashing in around her. She lay on top of her bed sobbing into her pillow. Life was not fair! Why did God allow bad things to happen?

Her brother Tad had been scheduled to leave last week for three months in China. Tad was a college student and he was going to China to tell people about Jesus during the Olympics. No missionaries are being allowed in by the Chinese government during the Olympics, but Tad was

going in with a Christian organization that was selling shirts & hats and pins. He would work long hours, but both on the job as well as during his off hours, he was encouraged to begin conversations about Jesus with Olympic athletes and visitors. He had been scheduled to leave on Saturday for LA and then to Beijing, China. The Olympics didn't begin until August 8, over a month away, but there was lots of set-up that needed to be done. Visitors and athletes would start arriving shortly after Tad and his group got to Beijing, so it was urgent that they get there quickly and get set up.

But on Thursday, (the day before he was to leave) Emily & Tad's mother had gone into labor. She was expecting a baby, and everyone hoped that the baby would come before Tad left for China. He was especially excited to see his newborn little brother or sister right before he left the country for twelve weeks.

But something had gone terribly wrong. Part way through the birth of the baby, the baby's heart stopped. The doctors worked quickly to save the baby. They did surgery on Emily's mother to get to the baby quickly. But even after they were able to get to the infant, they were unable to revive the little girl. Emily had hoped and hoped for a baby sister. She and her mom had talked many times about what names would be best for a little girl.

They had taken the baby away very quickly to find out why she had died and so Emily had not even seen her little

sister until the funeral. The service had been yesterday and Emily had cried all day long.

And then today, Tad had left for China. He had delayed his trip several days until the funeral was completed, so he could be with his family, but it was even more urgent that he head off to Beijing quickly.

Before he left, Tad yelled to Emily who was up in her room: “Emy! I need to talk to you before I go! I have something for you.”

Emily dried her eyes and patted down her hair and came down the stairway slowly.

Tad put his arm around his little sister and they walked out to the fence by the driveway. Behind them stood the basketball pole and hoop where her brother had taught Emy how to shoot a basketball. She was actually pretty good, now.

“Emy,” Tad began. “I’m going to *miss* you a lot while I am in China, but it is important that I go.”

“Why?” cried out Emily. “Why do you have to go? We lost our baby sister and now you are leaving! Our family is falling apart! What if you don’t come back? What if you are arrested for telling people about Jesus? What if your plane crashes? What if somebody there hurts you and you can’t get back!”

“Emy...do you believe in God?”

Emily was quiet for a minute. *Why did he have to ask that question right now, she thought?*

“Of course I do,” she replied. “It’s just that I can’t figure out why God let baby Cassandra die, using the name that her mother and father had picked out for the baby.. Was God not paying attention? Did God not love my sister? Why did she die? A baby being born is supposed to be a happy time; good news. It is supposed to be a time of celebration.”

“I know,” her brother said quietly. “But you have to believe that God will bring me back safe.”

“But what if he doesn’t?” questioned Emily.

“He will,”

“But we were sure he would give us a safe birth for Cassandra,” Emily stated.

“I know. And it IS possible I might not come back. But if I don’t, it’s not because I don’t want to come back. And it is not because God didn’t love me...or you. But God wants me to go tell people at the Olympics of God’s love for them and of his truth that can make their lives happy and complete. And if something happens that I die and can’t come back, then Cassandra and I will be waiting for you in heaven. I will tell her all about what a wonderful sister she has and how lucky she is that she will be able to meet you when you come to heaven, too.”

“Tad...I don’t think I can trust God to keep his promises. He seems to have let lots of bad things happen to me lately.”

“Em...God always keeps his promises. He doesn’t promise us that life will always be easy. Or that every baby will be born healthy, or even born. Or...that I will come back from China. But he does promise to be with us; to come where we are and comfort us and strengthen us and guide us.”

Tad reached into his pocket and pulled out a card: it was his student ID from Oregon State University. He handed it to Emily.

“Here. I need this when I register in September at school. You keep it safe for me. It is MY promise to you to come back and be ready to start school in September. Whenever you see it, I want you to think of me and pray for me and know that I intend to come back.

Then Tad reached around his neck and loosened the chain that held the silver cross he always wore.

“And I want you to wear this as a reminder that God keeps his promises. He sent Jesus to be born in Bethlehem after promising for thousands of years that he would come. He died on the cross to fulfill God’s promises that he would find a way to have all sins forgiven. And he promised he would come again and take us to be with him.

“God has ALWAYS kept his promises. That cross will serve as your reminder that God will keep his promises. He will either bring me home to you, or he will keep me safe in heaven waiting for you with Cassandra. But either way, God always keeps his promises. Jesus coming at Bethlehem assured us of that.”

And shortly after that he had left. They had all hugged and said their good-byes and Emily’s father had left with Tad to drive him to the Portland Airport.

And so now, Emily lay on her bed, sobbing. Her brother had only been gone an hour, but already she missed him. It seemed different than when he was in Corvallis at school. There were times during the school year when they hadn’t seen him for a couple of months, but never this long. And this was different. It was in a different country, and Tad was doing work that could get him arrested by the Chinese government.

Emily cried until she didn’t feel like she had any more tears. As she lay there, Chipper came up and nuzzled her hand with his nose. She began to stroke his nose and his head and he began to slowly move away from her, his sign that he wanted her to follow him.

At the door, he paused for Emily to open it. As she did, he bounded out the door and took off at a strong run.

Emily ran into the kitchen, where her mother was working and told her that she was going to take Chipper for a walk.

And then she was off after him. Their house stood in a clearing alongside the road. It was a large log home, with a massive fireplace rising out of one end. In front of the house and for a little ways in the back, Emily's mother had groomed a beautiful grass lawn, surrounded by beds of bright colorful flowers

But fifty yards out of the back door, the woods began. Tall pine and spruce. The ground was fairly clean. Periodically the Forest Service would come through and clean out underbrush to minimize fuel for forest fires, and so there was fairly easy running for Chipper and Emily as she followed him.

There weren't lots of sounds. But she could hear the squirrels chattering loudly from tree to tree.

Chipper ran circles around Emily and then stopped, panting. She scratched behind his ears, which he always loved and then they took off toward the meadow. It was one of both of their favorite places to be. As they walked side by side through the woods, Emily could feel the metal chain & cross around her neck. It still felt cold and strange. She had worn lots of necklaces before, but this one was different. It wasn't dainty. It wasn't light. Somehow she felt different wearing it.

They finally got to the meadow, and as she did, Chipper took off running. The meadow was covered with almost a carpet of plant life. There was a meandering stream, about three feet wide that swiftly made its way through all the vegetation, eventually pouring into the Metolius River.

As Emily walked across the meadow, suddenly Chipper started to bark. He was facing the woods near the old barn that stood on a hill overlooking the meadow. It was an old rickety barn that her parents had told her to stay away from. They said that they hoped it would be torn down before someone got hurt, but the older couple who owned it didn't seem in a hurry to do so.

She stood still for a while and looked at the woods. She didn't see anything. Chipper came running up to her and kept barking and turning toward the woods.

She smiled. He was her protector. Her family had had Chipper as long as she could remember and he always seemed to be looking out for her. He stopped barking, but stood watching the woods for a minute or two.

She scanned the woods again, but saw nothing. Within a minute Chipper was running & bounding in front of her. He never got too far away, but it was too beautiful a day to spend it in worry. Emily ran and laughed, the sad events going on in her life briefly forgotten.

Suddenly, Chipper stopped again...his ears pointed up in the air. As she watched, she saw a boy about her age come down the road towards the barn.

Chipper started to growl, but Emily began to scratch him behind the ears. It seemed odd that Chipper had been barking at the woods, when this boy was coming down the road, but maybe Chipper had heard him coming through the trees. She stood watching him approach the barn and then go inside.

From the woods, behind a fallen log, another pair of eyes—the ones that Chipper had been barking at—watched Brandon enter while also keeping a close eye on Emily and Chipper.

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. Why is the birth of a baby a time for celebrating? Why was Jesus' birth a particular time of celebration?
2. Have you ever known someone who had a baby die? It is a very sad time. How do you think you could help them?
3. Have you been afraid when someone you loved very much went away? Did they return? What did you do when you were afraid?
4. Memorize I John 1:9.
5. How is Christmas a reminder that God always keeps his promises?

Three

Day one we were introduced to Brandon. We learned that he was visiting central Oregon from Bayshore on the coast for the fourth of July holiday. He had snuck into his grandparents barn without their permission. Brandon had a step-brother and a step-sister and their father showed a lot of favoritism to them over him. When Brandon heard his grandfather speak about his medals & uniforms that were stolen by his sister, he suddenly remembers seeing a duffel bag in the barn similar to what his grandfather described.

Then yesterday we met Emily. Emily's mother was pregnant, but the baby died during birth last week. Her brother, who was leaving on a mission trip to China, delayed his departure, but had just left this morning.

Emily was, of course, very upset that her brother was leaving and she is afraid that he will not come back and she will have lost both her newborn sister and her older brother. But Tad gave her two things: his Oregon State University ID card, for safekeeping until he returned in the fall, and the

cross he always wore around his neck. Emily received the items in trust, but was still upset and so she and her dog Chipper went for a walk in the woods and the large meadow near their home.

Suddenly, Chipper's ears pointed up in the air. As she watched, she saw a boy about her age come down the road towards the barn.

Chipper started to growl, but Emily began to scratch him behind the ears. It seemed odd that Chipper had been barking earlier a different direction at the woods, when this boy was coming down the road, but maybe Chipper had heard him coming through the trees. She stood watching him approach the barn and then go inside.

Brandon coughed as soon as he entered the barn. Dust seemed to fill the air. It had been later in the day yesterday when he had been in here and the sun was in a different position. This morning, the sun shone brightly in the open doors. It gave more light in the barn, but he would also see the dust more clearly. Brandon had a touch of asthma and he knew that too much dust would give him trouble. He hadn't noticed so much yesterday.

He gave a quick scan of the floor to make sure there no snakes and then walked over to the inside room below where the crates and wooden boxes were stored...and where he had seen the green duffel bag. Maybe there was a

ladder or stairway leading from inside that room up to it's roof where everything had been stored. He tried the door handle and it turned smoothly, but the door didn't open. He saw a hasp with an old padlock about five feet off the ground. He reached up and grabbed the lock to make sure it was actually locked. It was.

Brandon raised his foot and kicked at the door to see if he could force it open. He couldn't.

He turned and leaned against the wall and looked around the barn. Surely there was SOME way to get up on that upper level.

His eyes scanned. There were no loose ladders he could use to just put up against the wall of the inside room and scale to the top. It was too far from the hay mow to the upper level of the inside room to take 2-3 boards and make a temporary bridge

And suddenly he saw the rope. There was a heavy rope hanging from one of the highest beams in the barn. It was old and looked rough, but perhaps if he got a running start, he could hold onto the rope and use it to swing over on top of the ceiling of the inside room. It hung down and was looped around a large spike that had been pounded into the wall of the hay mow.

Brandon made his way over to the ladder and began to ascend to the mow, mindful that last time one of the rungs had broken. He slowly worked his way up, one hand at a

“This is my grandpa’s barn. They used to use it when he was a kid. There was a house toward the creek.”

“Are you sure it’s safe up there on that ladder?”

“Sure...I think so..... Anyway, I’m looking for something and I need to be up here to see it.”

“What are you looking for?”

“It’s not really any of your business,” said Brandon sharply, suddenly a little defensive.

“OK...,” replied Emily, a little hurt.

There was a silence between them for a minute. It was so quiet that Emily could hear Chipper’s breathing.

“Well, we’d better go. Let’s go Chipper.”

Suddenly Brandon changed his mind. “Wait a minute. Maybe you could help me. I am needing to get something that was lost and I need to swing from the hay mow over to that ledge. I was planning on using that rope up there to swing between the two ledges. Maybe you could help me swing.”

Emily looked suspiciously at Brandon. “Why the sudden change of heart? That seems very dangerous. What did you lose?”

“It is something INCREDIBLY important. Something very, very, very special. I HAVE to find it.”

“Wow! It must be pretty valuable. Is it worth a lot of money?”

“No, not really. It is my grandpa’s war medals. He lost them forty years ago and I am pretty sure I have found where they are. I want to find them and return them to him so he can march in the Fourth of July parade in Sisters this Friday.”

“Medals? Is that all?”

“They are important. My grandpa earned them and risked his life in war to earn them.”

He finished crawling the rest of the way onto the hay mow and went on to show how he had seen the duffel bag behind the toppled over stack of crates.

“Medals are a pretty small thing to lose. My baby sister died last week. My brother left today to go to China for two months. It is dangerous there and he may never return. THOSE are important things to lose,” Emily said in a frustrated tone of voice.

Again there was silence in the barn.

“Let’s go, Chipper,” she said again. She turned to go.

“Wait! Please don’t go! I didn’t know your sister had died and your brother had left. Your right. Those things are more important than medals. People are ALWAYS more important than things. We can like things and want things, but they are never as important as people. I didn’t say that these medals are more important than your sister and brother. I am sorry about your baby sister. And I hope your brother comes back, OK. But I can’t do anything about

either of those. But these medals show that my grandpa risked his life for his country. And it was his little sister who took them and hid them and then the next day she died when the house by the creek burned down. HE lost someone too. She was the last one to have these medals and so they are kind of a connection with his baby sister, too.”

Emily was quiet for a while.

“That rope looks pretty old. You sure that it will hold you if you swing over?”

“I... hope so...,” said Brandon. “That’s kind of why I hoped you would stay.”

“Well, I could give you a push to make sure make it all the way across.”

“Great!” yelled Brandon.

Emily began to climb the ladder while Chipper stood at the bottom and watched her go up.

Finally she reached the top of the ladder and stood with Brandon. By this time he was already unwinding the rope from the hook on the wall. He gave it several hard tugs to see if it would hold his weight and while the beam above him creaked, it seemed plenty secure. He had Emily come over and both of them tugged on the rope. It seemed like it would hold just fine.

“I’m going to back up with the rope in my hands and run. I want you behind me and right before get to the edge, I want you to push me from behind. Just don’t do it when you are too close to the edge or you might fall off of the mow.”

Emily looked seriously at the edge. She suddenly wasn’t sure she really liked this idea.

But Brandon was determined. He grabbed the rope tightly and walked over to the wall at the back of the mow. With Emily behind him he began running. As they ran together she asked Brandon “And how are you going to get the rope over there so you can swing back?”

But before he could answer he reached the edge. Emily gave him a swift shove. As she did so she fell to her knees and hands. But her head watched at Brandon swung high & far. He was halfway there...and then he was almost there... and suddenly he was over the ceiling of the locked room. He quickly let go of the rope and dropped down about a foot.

Emily crouched there, still on all fours. She watched as he landed onto the platform where the crates lay. He had a big smile on his face.

Brandon moved carefully over to the stack of crates and boxes. The duffel bag was down fairly low with several other boxes leaning against it. Half of it stuck out.

Brandon reached for the zipper, which was very slow to unzip. He could unzip it about part of the way.

He opened the bag wide and gave a puzzled look. He tried to pull the zipper open wider.

“What are you seeing?” shouted Emily across the barn.

Brandon reached in his hand and pulled out some thick leather straps. Some were wide and others were narrow. Some of them had metal on them, but no medals. He turned to show them to Emily.

Bridles with bits! Harnesses with buckles! Stirrups! Some polyester leads. All equipment for horses! Brandon kept pulling more and more leather equipment out of the bag.

“There HAS to be something in here besides this leather!” he shouted, sounding panicky. But with the little hole he had unzipped, it was hard to see back further into the duffel. Perhaps if he pulled the bag out he could reach whatever was in the other end!

He grabbed the material and gave it a tug. Nothing moved. He pulled again. Nothing moved. There was a part of a canvas handle sticking out from under a box.

Emily wondered if Brandon shouldn't move some of the boxes off of the duffel bag. But as she wondered that, Brandon gave a big tug onto the canvas handle and the bag came loose.

But at that moment an avalanche of crates came falling down as well.

Brandon jumped back from the falling crates, his feet backtracking across the platform as fast as he could. After taking five or six steps backwards he stepped from the deck onto the open rafters, which the deck did not cover.

Suddenly Brandon's face turned toward Emily and it showed panic as the floor gave way underneath him.

Emily watched in horror as Brandon fell out of sight.

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. Why do you think Brandon did not tell the complete truth about why he was in the barn at first?
2. Have you seen times when one sin (like disobedience or lying) leads to another?
3. Do you believe that people are more important than things? Why or why not?
4. What did God do because of his love for people?
5. Memorize I Corinthians 13:4.
6. How is the love in this verse seen also in the love of God?

Four

Yesterday, we left Brandon & Emily in a bit of a jam. Emily had gone out with her dog Chipper after saying good bye to her brother who was leaving for China. She had stumbled upon Brandon as he was going back up the ladder to the hay mow, trying to see if his grandfather's medals are in the duffel bag that he had seen across the barn.

He finally asked Emily to help him retrieve the medals and she agreed. After climbing up on the hay mow, she gave him a push just as he was ready to swing over to the other side to a ceiling on top of the locked inner room in the barn. He swung over, the width of the barn and just as he was over the ceiling of the inner room, he quickly let go of the rope and dropped onto the platform where the crates lay.

Emily crouched there, still on all fours. She watched as he dropped onto the floor. He had gone over to the duffel bag & started pulling stuff out, but he only found bridles and harnesses...equipment for horses. Exasperated that he

couldn't reach all the way back in the bag, he gave it a big tug & pulled the pile of boxes & crates on top of it down on himself. Panicking, he took several fast step backwards and stepped off of the platform onto the open rafters.

Suddenly Brandon's face turned toward Emily and it showed panic as the floor gave way underneath him.

Emily watched in horror as Brandon fell out of sight.

“BRANDON!!” Emily yelled. “BRANDON!”

At first there was no answer. Chipper was barking over at the door of the inner room and barking furiously. She listened carefully, but still didn't hear anything from inside the inner room on the other side of the barn.

She quickly got up off of her hands and knees and scurried over to the ladder. Moving slowly she began to descend the ladder. As she did so, she began to feel the pain of her knees and palms. She glanced at her palm and saw how skinned they were. Blood dripped down her left knee.

She quickly reached the bottom of the ladder and sprinted over to the door of the inner room. She grabbed the door handle, turned it and put her body weight into the door. The door, however, didn't budge. A quick glance showed her the problem. The padlock and hasp were just above her head. She knocked with her fist on the door.

“Brandon! Brandon! Are you OK?”

She heard nothing.

“Brandon! Brandon! Are you OK?”

The more she knocked and yelled, the more alarmed she became when she heard nothing from beyond the door.

She tried to hold very still and listen. Maybe she could hear him breathe? She couldn't, but when she was extremely quiet she could hear the rapid click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click of little feet running around on the floor of the room inside.

What if something terrible had happened to Brandon? What was in there with him? Where had he said that he lived? Who was he here visiting?

Suddenly the things he had told her so casually seemed critically important but she couldn't remember what he had said.

“Dear God, please help Brandon. Last Easter we learned that the resurrection of Jesus reminds us that you are able to take something that SEEMS horrible and turn it into something good. Please take this bad something and turn it into something good.”

Emily went to church regularly with her parents, but had never had to rely totally on God. Now, she knew that this boy's safety depended on her and she felt very inadequate.

She considered her situation: *I could run and get help. But leaving Brandon here all alone could mean trouble*

for him. Maybe I should swing over like he did and try to see him through the hole.

Then she noticed that the rope hung limply in the middle of the barn. It was too high for her to reach from the floor and too far away from the mow to reach. There was absolutely no way for her to get over to the ceiling of the room using the rope.

Maybe there was a pole or rake she could use to pull it over. She searched over the walls of the main floor and then the mow and found nothing.

Maybe outside I could find something.

She returned to the locked door. "Brandon, I'm going to look for something so I can grab the rope and swing over to you," she yelled loudly.

She sprinted out the open space in the front of the barn where the doors had formerly been. She began to walk her way around the perimeter of the barn.

The outside of the barn was overgrown with weeds and sage. She made her way carefully either stepping high or stepping around the many brush piles that were there.

As she stepped around one, suddenly her foot caught on something and she partially spun around and stumbled. Her foot was caught. *What was that?* She planted her other foot and began to wiggle the foot that was caught around until she was able to pull it out. She pulled back the

weeds...a ladder! An old metal ladder, but a ladder none-the-less.

She reached down to pull it up, but it stuck fast to the ground. It apparently had been here a long time. She looked around for something with which to pry the ladder loose. There was a pile of brush at the back corner of the barn. She quickly found a branch that was about an inch thick and over two feet long. She came back to the ladder & got the branch under one edge of the ladder. She pulled and pushed, but it didn't move. She remembered that she had learned about levers in school. She glanced around and found a fairly good sized rock that she was able to roll near to the ladder.

Putting one end of the branch under the ladder and putting the middle of the branch on the rock she tried to pry the ladder loose. She pushed a couple of times and then suddenly the ladder popped up.

Large chunks of mud and grass clung to the ladder. She took her foot and kicked off as many large clumps & clods as she could and then she began to drag the ladder back into the barn.

The ladder clattered and clanked over dirt and rocks as she drug it. When it entered the barn, every clatter and clank echoed throughout the big open space. She drug it, leaving a trail of scratches and dirt clods and plant leaves

and stems on the barn floor. Chipper plodded along beside her as if giving moral support.

Finally she had the ladder at the door into the storage room. She went to the far end and slowly walked the ladder up in place, but as she did, the legs came off the ground and the ladder became off balance and fell to the ground.

She tried this three times, but on the fourth time, she was able to be far enough toward the middle of the ladder so that she could keep the legs down, and slowly lift the ladder up to position. It rested about a foot over the edge of the ceiling of the inside room.

“Brandon, I’m back!” she yelled. She still heard nothing.

She started to climb up the ladder and suddenly Chipper was barking like crazy. Chipper would bark and then run to the barn door and then come back and bark some more. He did this several times, until she realized what he was trying to do. He wanted to run & get help. She tried to find something for Chipper to take. She climbed back down to the floor and took off Tad’s necklace. She tried to fit it around Chipper’s neck, but it wouldn’t fit. Finally she pulled Tad’s OSU ID out of her pocket. He had given it to her for safekeeping, but she needed something that she was positive her parents would be able to know she would not quickly give up unless there was an emergency. She gave the ID to Chipper, who took it in his teeth. He

immediately turned and ran out of the barn, she presumed running towards home.

Hopefully he wouldn't drop the ID and he would be able to find her parents and they would understand why Chipper was returning with Tad's ID.

Slowly, Emily began up the ladder. Because it was metal, it was steadier than the wooden ladder leading up to the hay mow. She took one step at a time until her head poked up above the top of the wall.

There Emily could see close up what she had seen from a distance on the hay mow. The top of the room was ribbed with ceiling joists. And about 1/3 of the room was covered with a wooden deck on top of the ceiling beams. For the rest of the ceiling there were ceiling joists, but thin lattice strips and plaster which formed the ceiling of the locked room. The deck was really only flat boards laid on top of the ceiling joists to support whatever was up there. And along the back wall of the deck were the boxes and crates that she and Brandon had been able to see. And, in fact, she could see clearly the green canvas bag which Brandon had pointed out laying by itself in the middle of the mess of boxes on the deck.

She pulled herself up on the deck and she was suddenly better able to see what had happened. Moving to get away from the falling boxes, Brandon had stepped from

the deck onto the plaster lattice, which would not sustain his weight. It had collapsed under him and he had fallen between the ceiling joists down to the floor below.

Emily scurried over to the edge of the deck and looked down. At first she couldn't see Brandon.

Suddenly two large rats went scurrying across the floor beneath her. Again she heard that click, click, click, click. That was the sound she had heard!

As Emily pulled back in disgust suddenly she noticed two things at once. One was a percussive breathing, the kind that someone makes when they are trying to stifle crying. She also noticed a shoe sticking out from the edge of the hole. She moved back and saw Brandon huddled in a corner clutching his left arm to his body. He was wide eyed and she could see streaks on his face where tears had washed away the dirt that covered the rest of his face. He was absolutely terrified. But he didn't seem to be watching where the rats had run.

Emily stuck her head down the hole to better see what Brandon was watching.

Curled in the opposite corner, was the largest snake she had ever seen!

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. Have there been times when you have seen God take something bad and bring something good out of it? Describe one of them.
2. Have there been times when you were too afraid to speak? How could God have helped you?
3. Do you have something pretty awful in your life right now? How does the resurrection of Jesus show God's power in bringing something wonderful out of something terrible?
4. Memorize I John 5:11

Five

Yesterday we left Emily and Brandon stuck in the barn. Emily was unable to swing to the deck on top of the inside room, but was able to find a ladder outside. When she climbed to the top, she found the hole created where Brandon had fallen through the ceiling.

Emily scurried over to the edge of the deck and looked down. At first she couldn't see Brandon.

Suddenly two large rats went scurrying across the floor beneath her. Again she heard that click, click, click, click. That was the sound she had heard!

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washed away the dirt that covered the rest of his face. He was absolutely terrified. But he didn't seem to be watching where the rats had run.

Emily stuck her head down the hole to better see what Brandon was watching.

Curled in the opposite corner, was the largest snake she had ever seen!

"Brandon!" Emily yelled. "Are you OK?"

Brandon didn't look up. He just continued to stare in the same direction as before—at the snake.

"Brandon!" she repeated.

Again, no response.

Suddenly a verse from Sunday School popped into her head.

"Brandon! I know a verse from the Bible. It says, *'The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.'*¹ Think of that! *'The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.'*

Brandon's eyes quickly darted up to where Emily was and then jerked back down at the snake. It was a yellowish snake with brown and red blotching.

Emily estimated that the snake must be 5-6 feet long if it were stretched out. It was thick and curled up on itself.

¹ Exod. 15:12

The snake had not moved at anytime while she was watching it. She glanced at its tail which came to a gradual point. The head was extended out away from the body and flat on the ground.

“Brandon, look at me,” Emily stated.

Brandon didn’t take his eyes off of the snake.

“Brandon, look at me,” Emily insisted again.

His eyes did not move.

“Brandon, first of all, that is a gopher snake. It wouldn’t hurt you. We have lots of them around here. Second, it’s dead. It hasn’t moved and it would be terrified of you and would be trying to mimic a rattlesnake to chase you away if were alive. It wouldn’t be sticking its neck and head out like that making it easy for you to smash his head. Plus, the rats were running over the room earlier. They know whether the snake is alive or not, because gopher snakes EAT mice and rats and birds. If the rats thought it was alive, they would not venture out anywhere near it. I don’t know how it died, but it isn’t alive.

“I don’t care,” Brandon said softly.

“Well, that’s your choice, but it is totally dead.”

“Are you sure?” he asked keeping his eye on the snake.

“Absolutely,” came the reply.

“I think I broke my arm when I fell. It REALLY hurts,” Brandon said, his voice shaking.

“OK, but you’re going to be alright. I sent Chipper to get help.”

“Your dog?!” said Brandon incredulously.

“Chipper is a smart dog. But you know what? It isn’t just Chipper that knows we’re here. God knows as well.”

“God?”

“Sure...God. You DO believe in God don’t you?” asked Emily.

“I don’t know...I guess so. We don’t talk about God at our house. I have some friends, Nick & Kayla in Bayshore who go to church, but I haven’t gone with them.”

“Well, it’s not JUST going to church. God is with us all the time. He has given us so many things and he promises to be with those who walk with him. He has done so much for us that we can be thankful for, he’ll help us through this, too.”

“I don’t think that God knows I’m alive. He sure doesn’t do much for me.” Brandon said, looking more and more up at Emily through the ceiling, but still occasionally checking on the dead snake.

“Oh, he knows. What things are you thankful for?”

Brandon was quiet for a minute. “I don’t think I have much to be thankful for. My mom married my step-father who hates me; and I have a step-brother and sister who are a big pain. I am here away from my friends and my

videogames. And I miss my home at the coast. I don't have ANYTHING to be thankful for."

"Wait a minute," protested Emily. "Does your mom love you?"

"Well, sure."

"OK, there's one. Not everybody's parents even LIKE them, not to mention love them. You have friends back home?"

"Well, yeah..."

"Not everybody has friends. Are you healthy?"

"Well, I WAS, before I fell," Brandon said half-smiling.

"OK...but you didn't hurt your head. Does your step-father hurt you?"

"No, not physically. He is just mean to me. But he does buy me videogames sometimes and he lets me play with them after my homework is done."

"Well...no one should be mean to you, especially a parent. What else?"

"I have a great grandma & grandfather I can come visit."

"Absolutely."

"So..." Brandon changed the subject. "What about you? Your brother is gone to China and your baby sister died. What do you have to be thankful for in YOUR life?"

"Lots. My parents love me and take care of me, I have a church family and lots of friends there and at school.

I love our home and I love to read and I love to walk in the woods and I love my dog Chipper. My mom and dad and Tad love God very, very much. I have a brother who loves Jesus so much he is risking his life to go tell others in China about him..."

"Why did your brother go to China and why won't he come back?"

"Our family are Christians and he is going to work at a job during the Olympics and he is going to try to tell people, like athletes and visitors, about Jesus."

"Why would he need to tell them about Jesus? Hasn't everybody at least heard of Jesus?" asked Brandon, genuinely puzzled.

"No they haven't. But it's not just so they can KNOW ABOUT Jesus. It is so they can build a love friendship with him. Jesus can take away the guilt of all the bad things we have ever done and he can guide us to live good lives and he promises us that if we are in a love relationship with him that we will be able to live forever with him in heaven."

"But EVERYBODY goes to heaven. At least that is what my mom says,"

"Well that is not true. Only those people who WANT to be with Jesus because they had a love relationship with him here on earth will be the ones who go to heaven," explained Emily.

“You mean that I won’t go to heaven? If I had died falling through that ceiling, I wouldn’t be going to heaven?”

“That’s what the Bible teaches. Only those who have a love friendship with Jesus here on this earth and who ask him to take away the guilt of their sins and who seek to follow him will be going to heaven.

Brandon was silent for a little bit.

“So, if God is so big, why would he let your brother die?”

Now it was Emily’s time to be quiet for a minute.

“I have to trust that he won’t. God is there in China just as much as he is here. If God’s big enough to do all that for me, he is certainly big enough to take care of Tad. And if something does happen, then God knew about it and has a reason for it. Just like what happened with my baby sister.

“Hey! What are you doing up there? Who are you and why are you in here?” suddenly asked a female voice from the door to the barn.

Emily’s head jerked around. She saw a teenage girl, probably 13 or 14 standing in the doorway, holding something in her hand.

“Who are you and what are you doing?” the teenager repeated.

“I’m helping a friend who is hurt. Who are you?”

“This is my family’s barn and YOU don’t belong here.

Now get out!”

“My friend is hurt. He has hurt his arm. We need help.”

“I’ll help you. I’ll call the police and they will arrest you. That’s the kind of help you’ll get. Where is my brother Brandon? I followed him from the house and I watched him from the woods come in here.”

“Chrissy!” suddenly Brandon called from the inside room. “Chris! It’s me, Brandon! I need help!”

Suddenly the expression on Chris’ face changed.

“Brandon? Is that you? Has this girl hurt you? Where are you?”

“No. I’ve fallen through the ceiling of this room and it’s locked. I can’t get out. I think I’ve broken my arm. It REALLY hurts.”

“Brandon! You know your not supposed to be here in this barn.”

“I can explain that. But I just need help. Please go and get help.”

Emily was looking at Chris’ hand.

“What are you carrying?” she asked, a concerned tone in her voice.

Chris held it up.

“It’s somebody’s student ID.” Some dog came up. I tried to shoe it away. She was pretty insistent and she had this in her mouth. She didn’t want to let me have it, but I forced it out. She growled at me and I kicked at her. After that she took off. But why she is carrying somebody’s OSU ID, I have no idea.”

Emily’s heart sunk. That ID card was the way that she planned for her family to know that there was trouble.

Would ANYBODY come and help them?

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. What do you have to be thankful for?
2. How does thankfulness help build our trust in God?
3. What does Emily tell Brandon is necessary for someone to go to heaven? Have you done that?
4. Memorize Exodus 15:2

Six

Last night we left Brandon, with a broken arm, not having found his grandfather's medals in the duffel bag, locked in the inside storage room. Emily is on the ceiling platform trying to calm him down and Brandon's older step-sister Chris shows up with a bad attitude. She has also taken Tad's student ID away from Chipper, which was the way that Emily hoped that her family would know she was in trouble.

"I sent my dog with that ID so that my parents would know there was trouble. Now they will just think that Chipper came home and I am OK and following behind," said Emily in despair.

Chris looked stricken. "No wonder that dog didn't want me to have it. I just figured he had picked it up somewhere."

“But that means nobody will know we’re in trouble...,” Emily began. “it is important that we get Brandon out of that room. He’s hurt and there is a dead snake and rats in there. It is not a good place for him to be.”

“Rats! A snake! Gross!” yelled Chris, although she smiled as she said it.

She ran to the ladder and quickly climbed to the top and was laying on the platform next to Emily.

“Oh gross!” she yelled when she saw the snake.

“Brandon, do you see any way to get out of that room?” Chris asked.

He shook his head without saying a word.

“And there is no way to break down the door?”

Again, Brandon shook his head.

“Is there a window?”

Brandon glanced over to his side and nodded his head and pointed with his head over to the side.

“A window! Maybe we can get in that way!” said Chris.

Chris climbed back down the stairs as quick as she could and was out the door to find the window from the outside.

Within a minute, Emily heard her knocking at a window in the side of the room. Brandon looked up and smiled, weakly, at her. But all he could see was her knuckles rapping on the bottom part of the window pane.

Within a minute Chris was back climbing up the ladder to the inside room.

“The window is too high. Plus there is a drop off there. I need you to lift me up so I can climb in.”

Emily looked at her, “I don’t THINK so...you are way bigger than me.”

Chris rolled her eyes. “OK, I’ll lift you, but will need to work together to get someone in with Brandon.”

They explained the plan to Brandon and then both girls hustled down the ladder and around to the back.

And in what seemed like forever, but was probably only a couple of minutes, Emily had worked it open and was squirming her way in through the window to be with Brandon. She dropped down to the floor and moved over and sat down beside him.

“I maybe can’t get you out that window, but I can be here with you,” she told Brandon.

She shouted back at Chris, “Now you run and get help. Get to Brandon’s grandparents house. Now GO, girl.”

Chris didn’t have a chance to go, however. Before she was down the ladder, a pickup pulled in front of the barn and Chipper came running in, barking.

“Chipper! Emily shouted through the closed door. “Good boy...good boy,” she kept saying over and over.

Her father quickly followed Chipper into the barn, where Chris explained the situation to him.

“Chipper kept barking and running and coming back. We knew that he wanted us to follow him and since Emily wasn’t with him, we knew there was a problem. That dog was incredible. He only ran on roads or fields where he knew I could drive my pickup.”

He hustled out to his truck bed where he had his tool chest. He returned with several screwdrivers and a hacksaw.

In a couple of minutes, he had unscrewed the hasp from the door and it fell, with the padlock still closed, down to the floor.

He was immediately in the room and at Brandon’s side.

Asking for his grandparents phone number, he first called them and then 911 from his cell phone.

Within ten minutes, Brandon’s parents & grandparents were at the barn. Afraid that Brandon’s injuries were worse than just a broken arm, they refused to move him until an EMT had checked him out. The little room in the barn quickly filled with Brandon and Chris and Brandon’s mother and grandmother and Emily and her father. Before anyone else had come in, her father had gotten a shovel from his truck and lifted up the dead snake

and taken it outside the barn. Everyone seemed to breathe easier once that task was done. Everyone that is, except for Timmy, who stayed outside poking the dead snake with a stick.

Brandon's mother replaced Emily at his side while they waited for the ambulance to come from Sisters.

After quickly checking inside the room, Brandon's grandfather and step-father were up the ladder on the deck, surveying the mess made by the fallen crates and boxes.

Meanwhile Emily and Chris had left the little room and were sitting outside the barn. "There are way too many people in that little room," Chris had joked.

As they sat outside on the back of Emily's father's pickup bed, Chris asked Emily, "I have a question. I was listening at the door before I got your attention. What do you mean, telling Brandon that everybody who dies doesn't go to heaven? Are you trying to scare my brother?"

"I was just saying that only in Jesus can we be free from the guilt of our sins, free from the feelings of aloneness and anger and free from fear of what happens after death."

"Today is Independence Day, but the real independence day is when we give our hearts to Jesus."

Chris didn't say anything, but seemed deep in thought.

The two girls continued to talk for some time and Chrissy's heart seemed to be opening more and more the longer they talked.

The ambulance arrived with great fanfare. Sirens and lights came screaming down the path from the house to the barn, although there was no one there to get out of the way.

As the medics came in and checked out Brandon, they determined that they wanted to take him to the Bend Medical Clinic in Sisters. They brought in a stretcher and immobilized his arm so they could carry him safely into the ambulance.

As the medics were carrying him through the barn to the ambulance, Brandon's step father yelled at them, "Hey, wait a minute. Don't let Brandon leave. His grandfather has to talk with him."

They sat down the legs to the gurney and rested Brandon while David and Brandon's grandfather climbed down the ladder from the top of the inside room. His grandfather was carrying a jacket in his arm, with tears streaming down his face.

Before his grandfather could reprimand him for disobeying, Brandon began: "Grandpa. I'm sorry I disobeyed you. Please don't cry. If I had followed what you had told me, I wouldn't have fallen through the roof and

caused all this trouble. I know that now. I am really, really sorry,” Brandon began.

“Brandon, I want to show you something,” said his grandfather. “You pulled out that duffel bag that held horse equipment. We used to use it, but haven’t had horses here for years. I have known what was in that duffel bag for a long, long time. If you had just told me at the house, I would have told you what was inside and that would have been the end of the story. What you did was wrong and there will be consequences for what you have done that I will have to talk over with your mother. You must learn not to disobey.

“But,” he continued. “Everything is not all bad. We knew what was up on that platform and in that duffel bag and we had no reason to disturb it. But you ‘disturbed’ it. And what I haven’t known all along was that there was a second duffel bag hidden behind the first one.”

He held up a military uniform jacket, laden with medals.

“And this is what was in the duffel bag hidden behind the front one,” he said, his voice breaking as he spoke.

“Thelma must have taken my duffel and instead of hiding it in the house as we had presumed, have hidden it out here where she knew we wouldn’t look. And we hadn’t. For over 40 years.”

Brandon reached out and fingered several of the medals that were pinned to his grandfather’s jacket.

“The jacket is rotted and too small for me to wear, but I want to take it and show it to the other vets at the picnic tonight. And I want to tell them the story of how my grandson accidentally found something that had been lost and considered gone for over forty years.

“What you did was wrong, but even good can come out bad.”

“Now boys,” his grandfather continued, now speaking to the EMT’s. “Get my grandson to the clinic so he can be patched up. It’s just now lunch time and I want him back here for the picnic tonight and so that we all can watch the fireworks display on this Independence Day. It will be an Independence Day like none I have seen for years and years and years.”

Emily thought, however, “I suspect that with what God is trying to do in Brandon’s family, once they receive Christ, not just July 4th will be a Day of Independence, but from now on Everyday will be a Holiday!”

THE END

Parents Corner

Ask your student:

1. What do you hope will happen for Brandon’s family?
2. From what things does Jesus set us free?
3. How did God take something terrible & bring good out of it?
4. Was Brandon’s disobedience justified?
5. Memorize Psalm 77:11

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