

Victory Sports
Fall 2011 Devotions
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If you're new to Victory Sports, you are in for a *real treat!!* VSO is a unique, one-of-a-kind community sports league, whose mission is to share the love and life-saving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through sports! God has taken this ministry from 80 children in the winter of 2004 to averaging about 500 today. Praise God for His faithfulness!!

When games begin on Saturdays, the Gospel of Jesus is presented in weekly increments using the salvation colors model as follows:

- Gold represents God's glory
- Black represents man's sin
- Red represents Jesus' blood
- White represents purity or cleansing
- Green represents the new Christian's growth
- G- go to God in prayer
- R- read the Bible
- O- obey God, parents, teachers
- W- witness, tell others about Jesus

During the weekdays, however, instructional practices end with a short devotion. A fictional story begins the devotional time and Biblical principles are drawn out to apply to our lives. That's where you come in. Please be prepared to either read or summarize the lesson each week. Feel free to use easier language for little ones and add your own experiences if you have something you feel would add interest to the lesson.

Of course, we will have printed copies of the booklet available, but if you forget your booklet or come straight from work, you can also view and print the weekly lessons from the VSO website. Just go to victorysportsoutreach.org and look at the navigation bar on the left side of the home page. Toward the bottom, click on "devotions." This will take you to the devotions page where you can see a weekly schedule and view or print what you need for the week.

☞ This fall for our weekly devotions, we step into the lives of Jake Smith and his single mom Amy, who finds after-school childcare for him in the shop of next-door-neighbor Mr. Fred.

At first, Jake doesn't want to go to Mr. Fred's shop, but after he and Mr. Fred settle his misunderstanding, he begins to learn not only how to grow plants, but more importantly, how to grow as a Christian.

Note: All names, events, and places are purely fictional. Any similarities to Victory Sports participants is purely coincidental.

Here's what you can expect each week...*

Week #1- A Little Misunderstanding- Proverbs 3:5

Week #2- Ready, Set, Grow- 2 Peter 1:3

Week #3- Staying Connected to the Vine- John 15:5

Week #4- Root Bound- Hebrews 12:1

Week #5- The Fruit of the Spirit- Galatians 5:22-23

Week #6- What Do Prunes Have to Do With It? John 15:1-2

Week #7- Epilogue & Summary

***NOTE: If weather conditions force some practices to be cancelled, weeks 6 and 7 can be combined.**

Week 1- A Little Misunderstanding

Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

Lessons from the Nursery- Chapter 1:

School was just about to start again and Amy Smith had a problem. A BIG problem. You see, Amy was a single mom and her best friend was about to move away. Her best friend had always watched Amy’s 9-year old son, Jake, until she came home from work. But that was all about to change now.

What am I going to do, Lord? Amy thought to herself. She closed her eyes and prayed for help. When she finished praying, she got off her knees and looked out the window. She noticed some movement outside. It was just her next-door-neighbor, Mr. Fred, getting his morning paper. She had only lived in the neighborhood a few years, but knew that Mr. Fred was a fine older Christian man even though he went to a different church.

Suddenly, Amy got an idea. She closed her eyes again and prayed, “OK, Lord, I’m desperate right now, and if this is Your answer to me, please let him be open to the possibility of watching Jake after school at his plant nursery after school.”

Once again, she got up off her knees and went over to Mr. Fred’s house before she lost her nerve. Miraculously, Mr. Fred agreed to watch Jake each afternoon. He even seemed eager to teach him about growing plants.

“Why don’t you come over for dinner tonight and you two can get to know each other better?” Amy asked Mr. Fred.

“I’ll be there.” said Mr. Fred.

Amy went back home and called Jake downstairs. “I think the Lord has answered our prayer, Jake! Mr. Fred, next door, has agreed to let you get off the bus at his nursery each day after school. He’ll teach you lots of things and you can help him with things too. He’s going to come over for dinner tonight so you two can get to know each other better.”

“Uh.....OK.” Jake said less than enthusiastically. *Did she say I was going to a nursery? I thought Mr. Fred had a plant shop. Now she tells me I’m going to his nursery. I can’t believe she’d do that to me!* He was very angry and moped around for the rest of the afternoon.

Six o’clock rolled around and Amy was ready with a simple meal of spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread. The doorbell rang right on time. Jake ran to get the door.

“Well, hi, Jake!” said Mr. Fred with a smile, holding out a small potted plant of English ivy.

“Hi, Mr. Fred. Is this for me?” Jake asked.

“Yep- it’s for you to grow. Since you’ll be learning a lot about plants each afternoon in my nursery, I thought you’d want to try your hand at growing something yourself.” Mr. Fred smiled again.

Jake took the plant, but had a strange expression on his face. Jake *had* heard his mother correctly. He couldn't take it any longer. "Did you say I'd be in a *nursery*? Isn't that a place for *babies*?? I don't want to go to a place for *babies*- I'm *nine* now!" Jake declared.

Amy was shocked at Jake's outburst. Mr. Fred laughed a little and then said, "A *nursery* is also another name for a place where you grow plants. I can see how you could get confused though. Babies can't learn the kind of stuff you'll be learning, I can assure you."

"Jake, why didn't you just ask me what that word meant? I would've explained it to you. You apologize to Mr. Fred, right now!"

Jake looked down at the floor and said meekly, "I'm sorry I yelled, Mr. Fred. Please forgive me. Thank you for letting me come to your shop after school."

"I forgive you, Jake. Now, when do we eat? It sure smells good!" said Mr. Fred.

Follow-Up Questions:

1. What was Ms. Amy's big problem?
2. How was her problem solved?
3. What was Jake's misunderstanding?

Bible Thought~

In today's story, Jake thought he was going to a nursery where they take care of babies and toddlers, like at church. But there are two kinds of places we call nurseries, aren't there?

Jake relied on his own understanding of the situation instead of asking his mom to explain what she said.

In real life, we don't always understand things correctly. We make mistakes too, don't we? Today's verse is Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." God's thoughts and ways are so much higher than our ways that we can't always figure things out by ourselves.

Since we are sinful, imperfect people, we come to the wrong conclusions sometimes. (Ask if anyone came to the wrong conclusion by themselves- you are sure to get some interesting answers!!).

Give an example yourself of when you came to a wrong conclusion without asking for help.

Sometimes we see something as really bad when actually God has it planned to come out for our good instead.

*Maybe your family moved and you were really upset about it and you made new friends when you got there.

*Maybe you had to stay home from something and then something bad happened where you would have been.

If we don't understand something, we should ask instead of coming to a wrong conclusion on our own. We can also ask God for wisdom like as we read in the Bible from James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God, who gives generously to all

without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

The biggest mistake that we could make would be to assume we could get to heaven by ourselves. We cannot possibly do this because we are imperfect. The Bible tells us that we need God’s help desperately and He has already given us the solution- to understand our sin has kept us away from Him, and that by dying on the cross, Jesus took our punishment so that we could appear clean before God.

Let’s pray and ask God to give us wisdom and to show us where we need to ask for help from others.

Pray to close the session.

Week 2- Ready, Set, Grow!

2 Peter 1:3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”

Lessons from the Nursery- Chapter 2:

Jake was a little nervous on the first day of school. He was still in the same school building, but had a new teacher and a classroom. He was also going to be changing classes for math, something he hadn't done yet. As he made his way into his classroom, he prayed a little prayer asking for God's help. As it turned out, his teacher was really quite nice.

At the same time, Jake was a little excited, too. Today was the day he would get off the bus on Broad Street in front of Mr. Fred's plant shop. Finally, the school day was over and Jake got on the bus. After several stops, the bus arrived. Jake looked up and saw Mr. Fred's sign over the shop. It read, “Ready, Set, Grow!”

Jake got off the bus, pushed open the shop door, and heard the familiar bells clang. Mr. Fred came out from the back and greeted his new friend with a big smile.

“Hey, Jake! Ready to go to work?”

“I sure am, but I'm hungry. Can I have my snack first? I'm a growing boy, you know.” said Jake.

Mr. Fred chuckled to himself and replied, “You sure are. Did you know that plants need certain things to grow just like people?”

“They do? Like what?” asked Jake.

“Have your snack first, then come over here and you'll see for yourself.” Mr. Fred motioned for him to a large work table in the back room.

After Jake had his snack, Mr. Fred brought out a plant that needed to be planted in a bigger pot. He gave Jake a bag of potting soil and fertilizer.

“OK. Let's begin. Take a big scoop of the soil and a small scoop of the fertilizer. Now mix them together in this bucket first. Our plant has used up all of the minerals in the soil so we need to replace them.”

Jake picked up a small garden shovel and began mixing the soil. He liked playing in the dirt and soon Mr. Fred gave him the next step.

“Now, let's put the soil into the new pot and dig a little well in the middle for the plant. Then we'll take the plant and put it into the middle and fill in the hole. But don't pack the soil too tightly around the plant.”

Jake cautiously did as he was told. Next, Mr. Fred handed him a small watering can and directed him to water the plant in its new pot. When Mr. Fred sensed there was enough water, he said, “OK, now let's move the pot to a place where it can get enough sunlight.”

Jake followed Mr. Fred to a sunny spot in the nursery and set it down on a low table. Jake scrunched up his nose and squinted his eyes as he thought. He was trying to remember

everything a plant needs to grow. “So, plants need soil, food, water, air, and sunlight to grow, right, Mr. Fred?”

“That’s right, Jake. Just like you need food, water, exercise, and sleep as you grow, too. Most of what I do is inspect the plants every day to make sure they have what they need to grow properly. Let’s go around to each area and see how the plants are doing.”

Mr. Fred led Jake outside where there were rows and rows of tables of plants. Some were very small and some were quite large. Jake had never seen so many plants being grown in one spot before. Everything was so green! He was excited to be learning so many things with Mr. Fred in his plant nursery. He wondered what they would do tomorrow!

Follow Up Questions:

1. What things do plants need to grow?
2. What do people need to grow?

Bible Thought~

Have you ever stopped to consider that a plant cannot grow by itself? It needs things to be given to it- soil, nutrients, air, water, and the sun. When we begin a relationship with Jesus, He provides the necessary resources for us to grow spiritually.

Today’s verse is 2 Peter 1:3, “His divine power has given us **everything** we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”

What has God given to us to grow? Let’s think about that for a minute.

Just as a plant needs...	So we need...
The sun	God’s Son- the One Who died for us and took away our guilt and shame so we could be holy in God’s sight. Jesus has given us our life back when we were dead in our sins (see Eph. 2:1). This includes God’s mercy and grace.
Soil & nutrients	God’s Word- the Bible tells us Who God is, who we are, the consequences of sin, how much God loves us, God’s plan of redemption, and how the story ends (HE WINS!).
Air	The Holy Spirit- guiding us into all truth, convicting us when we need to repent, and helping us to understand God’s principles to live by .
Water	Good relationships that teach us God’s Word and help to encourage us to keep the faith.

Let’s stop and praise God for giving us everything we need for life!

Pray to close the session.

Week 3- Staying Connected to the Vine

John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Lessons from the Nursery- Chapter 3:

As Jake got off the bus in front of “Ready, Set, Grow!” he went in the front door and heard the bells clang against the door. He loved that sound. He didn’t see Mr. Fred up front, so he put his backpack down in the back room and began to search for him. Jake walked all around the shop and then went outside where he finally found Mr. Fred feverishly working on a plant that didn’t look right. He snuck up behind him silently and just watched...

Mr. Fred was cutting a slot in the main branch of a rose bush. He then stuck in a smaller branch that had a tag on it that showed a red rose and wired them together. Next, he cut a different slot in the main branch and stuck in another smaller branch with a tag that showed a picture of a yellow rose. He did the same thing with a white rose, a pink rose, and a peach-colored rose. Jake had never seen anything like this before!

Then, his nine-year old personality took over and he crept even closer to Mr. Fred before he let out a big, “BOO!”

Poor Mr. Fred. He was so startled that he nearly fell over!! After he caught his breath, he said, “Jake, I didn’t see you there! Let’s not do that to Mr. Fred, shall we? Your mom wouldn’t like it too much if I couldn’t take care of you anymore,” then he smiled and held out his arms as Jake ran and hugged him.

“Sorry, Mr. Fred. Hey, how come you’re making a mis-matched rose bush?” Jake asked.

“Some people like different kinds of flowers on one bush instead of having to have lots of different bushes, each with a different color bloom.” Mr. Fred answered. “So, we can graft in different branches and they will eventually grow into the central branch and become one plant. The main branch supplies all of the water and nutrients the branches will need. Pretty cool, huh?”

“Wow! Mom would really love something like this!” Jake exclaimed.

“I hadn’t thought of that. Maybe as a thank you for all your hard work, you could give this one to your mom after it gets established.”

“That’d be great!” Jake said as they went to go check on all the other plants.

Follow Up Questions:

1. What was Mr. Fred doing when Jake snuck up behind him?

Bible Thought~

In today’s story, Mr. Fred was making a multi-colored rose bush. Jesus talks about a

similar principle in the Bible in John chapter 15. In verse 5, He says, “I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.”

When we begin a relationship with Jesus, it’s as if we are connected to Him. It’s like He is the main stem and we are the branches. We get our life from Him. Our salvation is from Him and through Him. When we read God’s Word, it is like we are getting spiritual food from Him. That will make us grow into the person He wants us to become.

As plants grow, they bear fruit. When we grow in Christ, we will “bear fruit” too! We will treat others how Jesus would treat them. We will share and obey our parents and teachers. We will be more loving and kind to others. We will be more patient. We will tell others about Christ.

But the verse says that we must remain in Him to keep on “growing” and “bearing fruit.” What would happen to a plant that doesn’t get any water or nutrients from the soil? It would wither up, wouldn’t it? It is the same with us. When we don’t seek God or read His word, we don’t show those qualities in our lives.

The word “abiding” is what we usually say when we explain how we are to stay close to Him. It means to stay or to dwell. It has the connotation of staying or living somewhere for a very long time. That’s what Jesus wants us to do- live with Him each and every day.

Let’s stop and ask God to want to stay connected to Him and bear good fruit. Pray to close the session.

Week 4- Root Bound

Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Lessons from the Nursery: Chapter 4-

Jake was supposed to be going over his spelling words at the breakfast table because he had a quiz today. His mom took the list and began calling out the words. “Spell *tangle*,” she said.

“*T-A-N-G-L-E*,” Jake spelled the word correctly.

“Good, now spell *surround*,” his mom said next.

But Jake had gotten sidetracked with the cereal in his bowl. In his mind, he saw the raisins fighting the wheat flakes in an all-out battle! He used his spoon as a catapult for the raisin’s side. It wasn’t long before one of the raisins went flying across the table!

“Jake!” his mother yelled, “Stop! Please keep your mind on your words. Clean up the mess and spell the word *surround*,” she said as she handed him a napkin.

“*S-U-R...R-O...U-N-D*.” He had to really concentrate on those words.

The day in school didn’t go much better. His mind kept wandering and the teacher had to tell him three times to pay attention.

Maybe the afternoon at Mr. Fred’s would go better.

Jake got off the bus and pushed open the door to the nursery. Mr. Fred was right up front waiting for him.

“Did you have a good day in school?” Mr. Fred asked.

“Uh... I got a little distracted today and my teacher had to get on me about it, but I did OK on my spelling test anyway.”

“Well, that’s good. Let’s see what we can find to do in the ...” Mr. Fred didn’t get to finish his sentence. As he was turning around to go into the back room, he knocked over a large potted bush. The clay container crashed into tiny pieces and the soil scattered all over.

Mr. Fred bent down. “Oh no.... well, would you look at this? This plant is root bound. I would have had to replant it anyway. Let’s get the broom and dustpan.” said Mr. Fred.

“What does “root bound” mean?” asked Jake as he helped get the broom and dustpan from behind the door.

“Well, when plant roots run out of space and soil, they get all wound up like you see on this plant. They need to be able to spread out and get water and nutrients from the soil. If they’re all wound up, they don’t have what they need to grow. I guess it’s been in this pot too long. Let’s go ahead and replant it now while it’s obviously out of its pot.”

The two of them worked together and replanted the bush, giving it more soil and fertilizer and a larger pot. Then Mr. Fred grabbed a watering can and handed it to Jake.

“This one will do fine now,” Mr. Fred said as Jake watered the bush. “I think we saved it just in time.”

Follow-Up Questions:

1. What does “root bound” mean?

Bible Thought~

In our story today, the roots of the bush got all tangled up, but the Bible also talks about sin entangling us. Today’s verse is Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

The word *hinder* means to stop or slow down the progress of something. So we’re to get rid of things that will slow down us learning about and obeying God.

Let’s imagine for a moment that we’re taking a walk in the woods. We’re enjoying nature- the plants, trees, flowers, and birds, squirrels, etc. Then all of a sudden, we get our foot caught in a net and we’re hoisted up in the air!

What would you do? Would you say to yourself, “Gee, this is a new way to see the world. I kind of like it here upside down!”?

If we were to get tangled up in something, we would probably squirm and try to get free, wouldn’t we? Just like a plant needs a clear way to receive nutrients, we need a clear way to hear what God has to say to us. If we keep a certain sin in our lives, we are less likely to do be hear and obey God’s Word. We need to get away from sin!

The first thing we need to do is acknowledge that we do sin and ask God to forgive us. Then we need to enter into a relationship with him by believing that what He did on the cross for us was enough and asking Him to come into our life to manage it instead of us.

When we have a relationship with Jesus, He helps us turn away from our sin because that is something we cannot do long-term by ourselves.

Let’s pray and ask God to show us where we need him and for His strength to help us to get away from our sin.

Pray to close the session.

Chapter 5- Sweet and Sour Fruit

Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Lessons from the Nursery: Chapter 5-

Jake watered his plant before he went to school and made sure it had enough sun. The school day went well and Jake got off the bus at Mr. Fred’s nursery again. He opened the door and heard the familiar bells clang. Mr. Fred wasn’t at the front desk like he had been on other days, so Jake began to look for him.

Jake wound his way back to the fruit tree section where Mr. Fred was hunched over one plant, doing something with the soil. Jake thought it was best to not sneak up on him again. So he just began walking toward Mr. Fred. But something shiny caught his eye. It was a little green apple hanging from a low branch on a spindly little tree.

Hmmm... I wonder what that would taste like... Jake thought to himself. He quietly reached his hand up and plucked the apple off the branch. He lifted it up to his mouth to take a bite...

Mr. Fred had already looked up and saw what was about to take place, but he kept his mouth shut. He smiled as he waited to see the expression on Jake’s face as he took the bite.

Jake took a quick bite of the apple.

He winced.

He scrunched up his mouth.

He spit the apple out!

Mr. Fred, knowing all the while what would happen, approached poor Jake. “Not exactly what you thought it would be, was it?” he asked.

Still spitting, Jake replied, “No, sir! What was that? I thought it was an apple!”

“It was a crab-apple. They’re really sour. Most folks buy those trees just for decoration, not to eat.” said Mr. Fred. “Let’s go water this section of trees over here.”

Jake followed Mr. Fred over to the peach and pear trees and took hold of the hose that Mr. Fred handed to him. After the two of them made sure each tree had just the right amount of water, Mr. Fred asked, “Hey Jake, how about a ripe peach?”

“Yes, sir! That’d be great!” Jake exclaimed.

Mr. Fred reached up and plucked a ripe peach off the tree to his left. Jake eagerly took a bite.

It was sweet.

It was juicy.

It was awesome!

“Thanks Mr. Fred,” he said as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, “this is the

best peach ever!”

“You’re welcome. Let’s go get you a napkin and then go check on your mom’s rose bush.” And Mr. Fred led the way.

Follow-Up Questions:

1. What did Jake try to secretly eat?
2. Was it good?
3. What did Mr. Fred give Jake after he helped water the trees?

Bible Thought~

In our story today, Jake tasted some sour fruit. He tried to take the fruit himself without Mr. Fred’s permission and it turned out to be bad.

The Bible talks about fruit too, did you know that? Our verse today is Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

When we have a relationship with Jesus, His Holy Spirit helps us to become something much better than we were before. Like we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”

We can’t be “good” in God’s sense of the word on our own (we can’t be perfect). We must co-operate with Jesus by obeying His word and letting His Holy Spirit help to produce these characteristics in our lives.

Let’s go over them quickly. When I say the word, I want you to tell me how we could show that characteristic:

- *Love- what would it look like for someone to show God’s love ?
- *Joy- what does joy look like?
- *Peace- how can we be peaceful?
- *Patience- give me an example of being patient.
- *Kindness- how can we be kind?
- *Goodness- how can we be good?
- *Faithfulness- how can we be faithful?
- *Gentleness- what does being gentle look like?
- *Self-Control- how can we be self-controlled?

Let’s stop and pray for God to produce these characteristics in our lives.

Pray to close the session.

Week 6- What Do Prunes Have to Do With It?

John 15:1-2, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Lessons from the Nursery: Chapter 6-

Jake had been going to Mr. Fred’s now for a few months and he had learned a lot. He had continued to water his little ivy plant at home and it had grown over a foot! He even took the time to replant it when he could see the roots starting to come out the holes in the bottom of the pot.

It was now getting near his mom’s birthday, and Jake was excited. He and Mr. Fred thought this would be the perfect occasion to give her the rose bush they had been cultivating.

This particular afternoon was the day Mr. Fred said they would prune the rose bush so it would produce more rose buds in the spring. Jake thought that pruning meant putting prunes into the soil so that it would provide more nutrients for the plant over the winter.

As he walked into the nursery, Mr. Fred was waiting for him with a pair of gloves. He and Mr. Fred put on their gloves and walked over to the rose bush.

“Mr. Fred, all I see here are some snippers. Where are the prunes?” Jake asked.

“Prunes?” Mr. Fred laughed out loud this time. Surely Jake didn’t know that he had indeed had eaten several prunes with his breakfast that morning. In a few moments, everything became clear to Mr. Fred.

“Oh... when I said we were going to prune your mom’s rose bush, I didn’t mean we were going to put prunes into the soil. I meant we were going to trim some of the branches so that it will produce even more blooms for the spring.”

Jake was simply horrified! “Won’t that hurt the plant? This is Mom’s birthday present!” he proclaimed.

“Well, plants don’t feel pain. Trimming the branches will be good for the bush. Look here at this little branch. It looks a little withered anyway. We’ll just trim it off like this.” Mr. Fred grabbed the pruning shears and trimmed the little brown branch off. He then showed Jake a few more areas that needed trimming. Jake was too shaken up to do any of the cutting himself, so he just watched. He still wasn’t sure about this, but decided to wait and see if the plant would produce the big beautiful blooms that Mr. Fred said it should.

Follow-Up Questions:

1. What did Jake think that pruning meant?
2. What does it really mean?

Bible Thought~

In our story today, the rose bush needed some pruning so that it would produce more flowers. In real life, sometimes God needs to take things away from us so that we will rely on Him more. Even though plants don't feel hurt, we sometimes feel hurt when we get pruned, don't we? This can be emotionally or physically.

Today's verse is John 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Depending on how old we are, this can look different. When we're really young, God has our parents take care of us. Maybe they will say that we can't use a certain thing because it isn't good for us. Maybe it's a video game that has too much violence. Maybe it's a certain kind of movie or TV show that has questionable content. Maybe it is a certain friend that has bad habits that is beginning to rub off on us.

When we get a little older, God does things like this to us Himself. Maybe He will have us move jobs or move to a new town or just give up certain friends or habits that aren't good for us.

If you have ever seen the movie *Soul Surfer* about the life of surfer Bethany Hamilton, you will see a picture of God's pruning. A shark attack off the coast of Hawaii left Bethany with only one arm. Even though the attack was very difficult on her, she eventually knew this was part of God's plan for her. One of the things she learned is that she is a child of God whether she surfs or not. God just allowed her arm to be taken so she would have more of a chance to witness for him to others. And look, now there's been a movie made about her life.

We read in the Bible in Romans 8:28 that all things work for the good of them that love God. God knows what is best for us, even when we don't understand it. He knows what He is doing. God never says *Oops!*

He also says that He'll be with us during the good times and the rough times in our lives (Josh 1:9, Isaiah 43:2)

Let's stop and pray for faith even in the rough times and for His strength to sustain us in our weakness.

Pray to close the session.

Week 7- Epilogue & Summary

A few weeks later, Jake came through the front door of his home with Mr. Fred behind him.

“Hi, Mom, sorry I’m late,” Jake said as he rounded the corner to the living room.

Jake’s mom was in the kitchen taking out something for dinner when she came out to the living room to greet them. She wasn’t prepared for what she saw. Jake and Mr. Fred were all dressed up. Jake had a magnificent rose bush in his hands and Mr. Fred held out what looked like a card.

She took the card first. It wasn’t a card at all. It was an invitation to a birthday dinner at Mr. Fred’s house! It seemed that Jake and Mr. Fred had made dinner next door! She said a silent prayer to herself. *Thank you Lord, for Mr. Fred and all he’s done by helping me out with Jake.*

She held out her hand and took the big beautiful rose bush from Jake and smelled the one single pink bloom that seemed to come out just for her birthday. She looked at the tag and gasped!

“Five different colors of roses?!” she asked.

“It’s one of my specialties at the nursery. Jake thought you would like it for your birthday.” Mr. Fred replied.

“Thank you both!!” she said as she hugged Jake’s neck and went next door for dinner. Mr. Fred and Jake sang “Happy Birthday” to her. It was very off-key, but it was a joyful noise to her. It was Amy’s best birthday ever.

And the next spring, the rose bush in her front yard produced the biggest, most colorful blooms of anyone on the block.

The End.

What was your favorite part of the story? (See chart for review)

Week 1- Jake gets mixed up and thinks he’s going to a nursery school for babies.	Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”
Week 2- Jake learns that plants need air, water, soil & nutrients & sunshine to grow.	2 Peter 1:3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”

<p>Week 3- Jake watches Mr. Fred make a grafted rose bush with many colored blooms.</p>	<p>John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.”</p>
<p>Week 4- Jake helps Mr. Fred replant a bush that’s been knocked over and learns about plants being root bound.</p>	<p>Hebrews 12:1, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”</p>
<p>Week 5- Jake takes a bite of a crab apple and gets more than he bargains for.</p>	<p>Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”</p>
<p>Week 6- Jake thinks pruning a plant means sticking prunes into the soil for added nutrition.</p>	<p>John 15:1-2, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”</p>