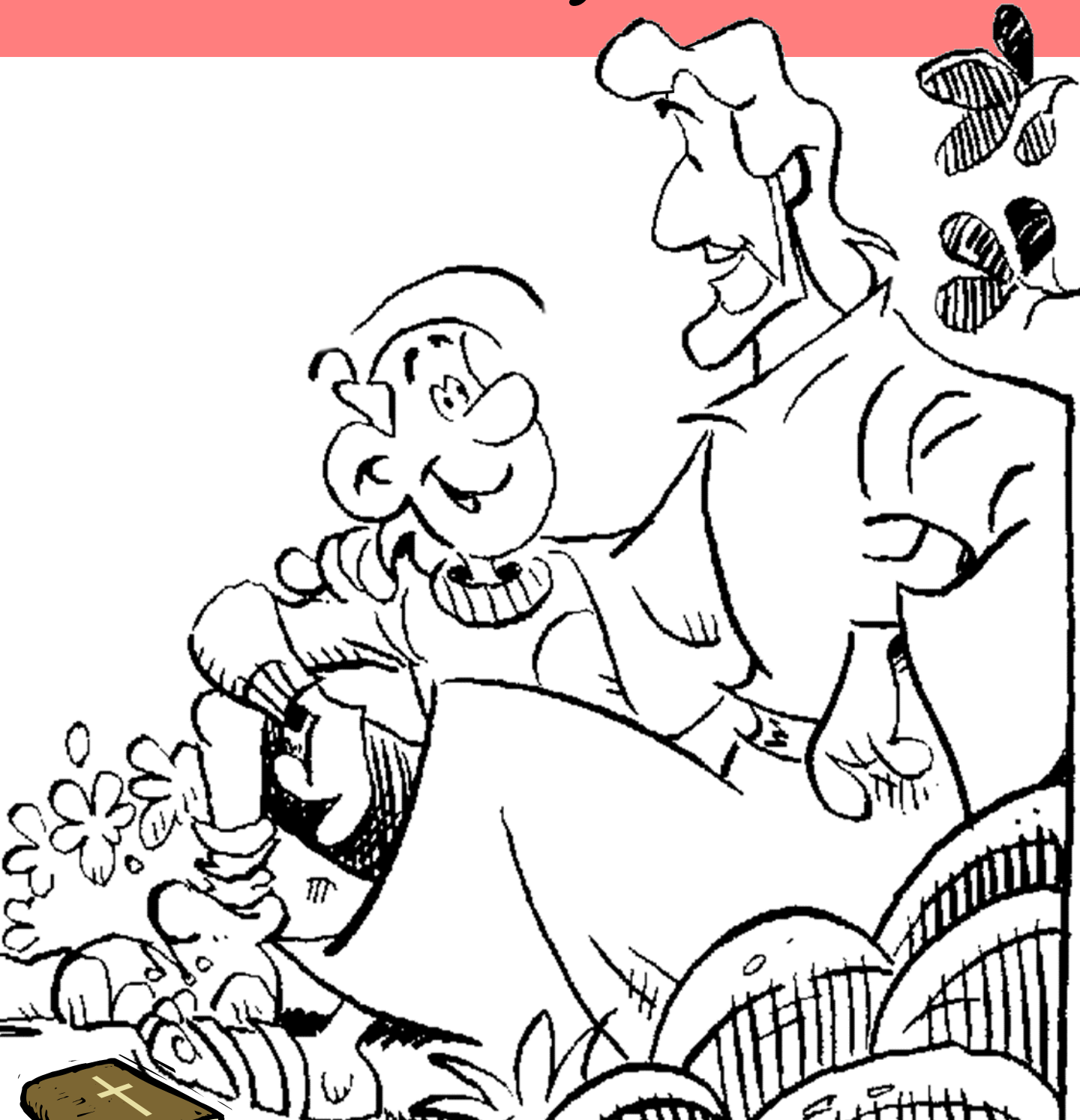


The Greatest Love

The Love of Jesus



Class Section 1: The Gift of Getting to Know Jesus

The story is told by the Persians of the great Shah Abbas, who reigned magnificently in Persia, but loved to mingle with the people in disguise. Once, dressed as a poor man, he descended the long flight of stairs, dark and damp, to the tiny cellar where the fire man, seated on ashes, was tending the furnace.

The king sat down beside him and began to talk. At mealtime the fire man produced some coarse, black bread and a jug of water and they ate and drank together. The Shah went away, but returned again and again, for his heart was filled with sympathy for the lonely man. He gave him sweet counsel, and the poor man opened his whole heart and loved this friend, so kind, so wise, and yet poor like himself.

At last the emperor thought, 'I will tell him who I am, and see what gift he will ask.' So he said, 'You think me poor, but I am Shah Abbas your emperor.' He expected a petition for some great thing, but the man sat silent, gazing on him with love and wonder. Then the king said, 'Haven't you understood? I can make you rich and noble, can give you a city, can appoint you as a great ruler. Have you nothing to ask?'

The man replied gently, 'Yes, my lord, I understood. But what is this you have done, to leave your palace and glory, to sit with me in this dark place, to partake of my coarse fare, to care whether my heart is glad or sorry? Even you can give nothing more precious. On others you may bestow rich presents, but to me you have given yourself; it only remains to ask that you never withdraw this gift of your friendship.'

God made Jesus to show us what He's like and what He looks like, you might say. It's too difficult for people to grasp the idea of God. He's just spirit and they can't see Him, they can't feel Him, they don't know where He is. He's everywhere, He's all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere. He's in everything and around everything and everywhere. That's just too big an idea for most people to grasp, so God had to show what He was like by making His Son in the form of a man so we could see Him and we would see what God is like because He's like Jesus in the spirit.

Hebrews 2:14,15,18 - Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. ...Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

Jesus left the Halls of Heaven for our sakes! Jesus Himself temporarily renounced the rights of His citizenship in Heaven and became a citizen of this world, and though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich. He was human—He got tired, He got hungry, He got weary. He was subject to all these things even as we are, yet without sin, that He might be a good High Priest, have compassion upon us, know how we feel, know when we're footsore and weary, know when we've had enough.

Hebrews 4:15—For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Class Section 2: God's Great Love for You

Jesus understands what we go through, and He loves us and wants to help us. He promises to always be with us. His love is so great that He died an agonizing death on the cross for us. His love is so great that He hasn't expected any one of us to earn our salvation, but He gives it to us as a great gift. No matter what mistakes and sins we've committed, as we bathe in the ocean of His love, we receive forgiveness. We can receive His blessings, all the goodness that He offers to us freely.



Romans 8:38-39 - Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*** Jesus calls us His friends**

John 15:15—No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

James 2:23b—"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

Hosea 2:23b—I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'

Jesus wants to be close to you

Jesus really cares about you and He wants you to be happy. When you're lonely and sad, He sees and He feels and He knows. He's always right there, just waiting to be your Best Friend. He's lonely sometimes, too, because He wants to be with you more. He wants to understand you, to listen to you, and to give you answers. You might think you're not very important and wonder why Jesus would want to spend time with you, but that's not the way He sees it. He's your Friend. He wants to talk to you. He wants to listen to you, and He wants you to listen to Him. He's always there; He never goes away. Jesus, your wonderful Best Friend, is always there for you, so don't forget it.

*** Jesus loves each of us personally, and cares about us as individuals**

Luke 12:7a—The very hairs of your head are all numbered.

John 10:2-3—But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Isaiah 43:1b—"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."

He loves each one of us, as though there were no one else to love. He died for each one of us, as if there were no one else to die for. He calls us by our names, for He cares for each of us as individuals.

How the grapes are ripened

Galileo, the pioneer Italian astronomer, is best

remembered for his work based on the theory of Copernicus, that the sun, rather than the earth, is the center of our universe. He was also the first man to use a telescope to study the skies.

One day someone asked him how he could reconcile the vastness of the universe with the idea of the care of God for every one of His creatures. His reply bears thinking about, especially as on first reading, it doesn't even seem to be an answer to the question asked. He said: "The sun, which has all those planets revolving around it, is able to ripen the smallest bunch of grapes as though it had nothing else to do in the universe."

*** He holds our hand. He holds us in His arms. He is always with us!**

Psalm 139:7-10—Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into Heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.



Isaiah 41:13—For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

Isaiah 42:6a—I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You...

Matthew 28:20 - I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

You'll never walk alone if you have Jesus in your heart. No matter where you are, you are in His hands and He'll take care of you. Jesus is the one possession you'll never have to give up, never have to leave behind, never lose. He'll always be near.

Footprints in the sand

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed You most, You would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My son, My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

* Jesus hears our cries and answers our prayers

Exodus 22:27b—And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious.

2 Samuel 22:7—In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears.

Psalms 55:17—Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.

Psalms 66:19—But certainly God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

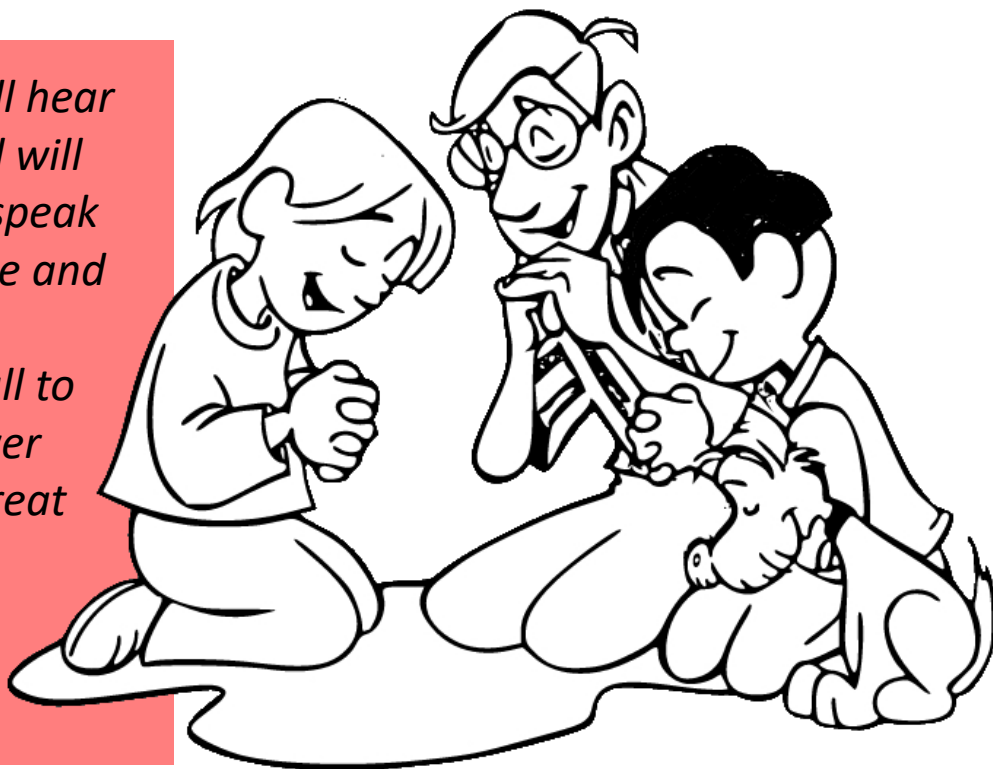
Psalms 145:19—He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; he also will hear their cry and save them.

Isaiah 65:24—It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

* The Lord not only listens, but talks to us too—a faithful Counselor

Psalms 85:8a—I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints.

Jeremiah 33:3 - Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.



God's life-saving intervention

Peter Marshall (chaplain to the U.S. Senate for a number of years), in his youth, spent a summer working in the English village of Bamburgh, sixteen miles southeast of the Scottish border. One very dark night as he was walking back to Bamburgh from a nearby village, he decided to take a shortcut. He knew that there was a deep, deserted limestone quarry in the area, but he thought he could avoid the danger spot. So he struck out across the moors. The night was starless and inky black, and the sound of the wind seemed to give it an eerie quality.

Suddenly he heard someone call, "Peter!" The voice was urgent. He stopped. "Yes, who is it? What do you want?"

For a second he listened, but there was only the sound of the wind. Thinking he must have been mistaken, he walked on a few paces. Then he heard it again, even more urgent: "Peter!"

This time he stopped dead still and tried to peer into the impenetrable blackness, and suddenly he stumbled, falling to his knees. He put out his hand to catch himself, but there was nothing there. Cautiously he felt around in a semicircle and found that he was on the very brink of the abandoned stone quarry. Just one more step would have sent him plummeting to his death!

Peter Marshall never forgot that voice. And there was never any doubt in his mind about the source of it.

*** He carries our burdens**

Nehemiah 4:20b—Our God will fight for us.

Isaiah 41:17—The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

Matthew 11:28-30—Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

*** He comforts us**

Isaiah 30:19b—You shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

Psalms 119:50—This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.

Isaiah 66:13a—As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.

*** He strengthens us. We can depend upon His help.**

Exodus 15:2—The Lord is my strength and song.

2 Samuel 22:33—God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect.

Psalms 28:7a—The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped.

Psalms 37:39—But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble.

Isaiah 25:4—For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to

the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; for the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

Isaiah 40:29—He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9—And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

*** In Jesus we find peace**

Psalms 29:11—The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

Isaiah 26:3—You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

John 14:27—Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Philippians 4:7—And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*** He takes care of our needs**

John 14:13-14—And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Philippians 4:19—And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Matthew 6:33—But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

*** He wants us to be happy**

2 Chronicles 9:7—Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!

Nehemiah 8:10b—The joy of the Lord is your strength.

John 10:10b—I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

John 16:24—Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Psalms 144:15—Happy are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the Lord!

Psalms 19:8a—The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

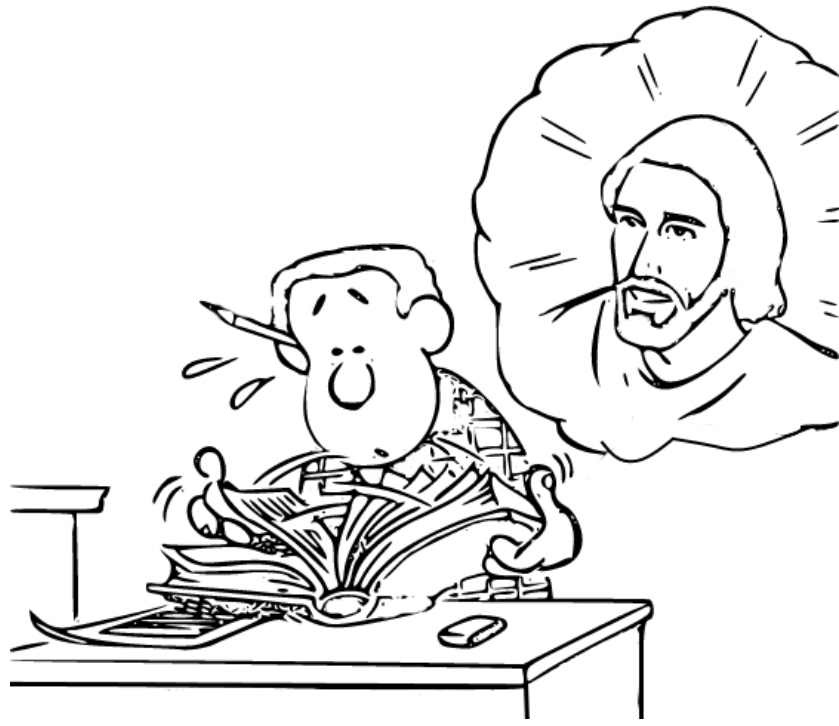
John 15:11—These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

*** He brings solutions to our problems**

1 Peter 5:7—Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Whatever our problems are, Jesus has the answers. If you'll just put your life in His hands, then He'll take care of and help you to deal with any problem that you have!—He can help you through it and make it easier for you and be the kind of support and comfort and friend that you need. Jesus cares about you and He loves you very much, and He sees and understands the suffering you're going through. His Word says that He cares for you, and that you can cast your cares upon Him. If you give your problems to Jesus, then He'll take care of you, and He'll give you the comfort and solutions you need.

Of course, the Lord does not instantly and automatically dissolve every single one of our problems as soon as we get saved, and this doesn't mean that you'll never have any problems again, but the Lord helps us with our problems and makes them easier to solve, easier to bear, and He does dissolve some of



them entirely and completely delivers us from them. However, there are other problems that He knows are good for us for one reason or another, and He helps us to handle these problems, and gives us the grace and the patience and the love to bear them.

*** He works things out for our benefit**

Romans 8:28—And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

The Lord loves us and works out the circumstances of life for our benefit, even if we can't always easily recognize things as "good."

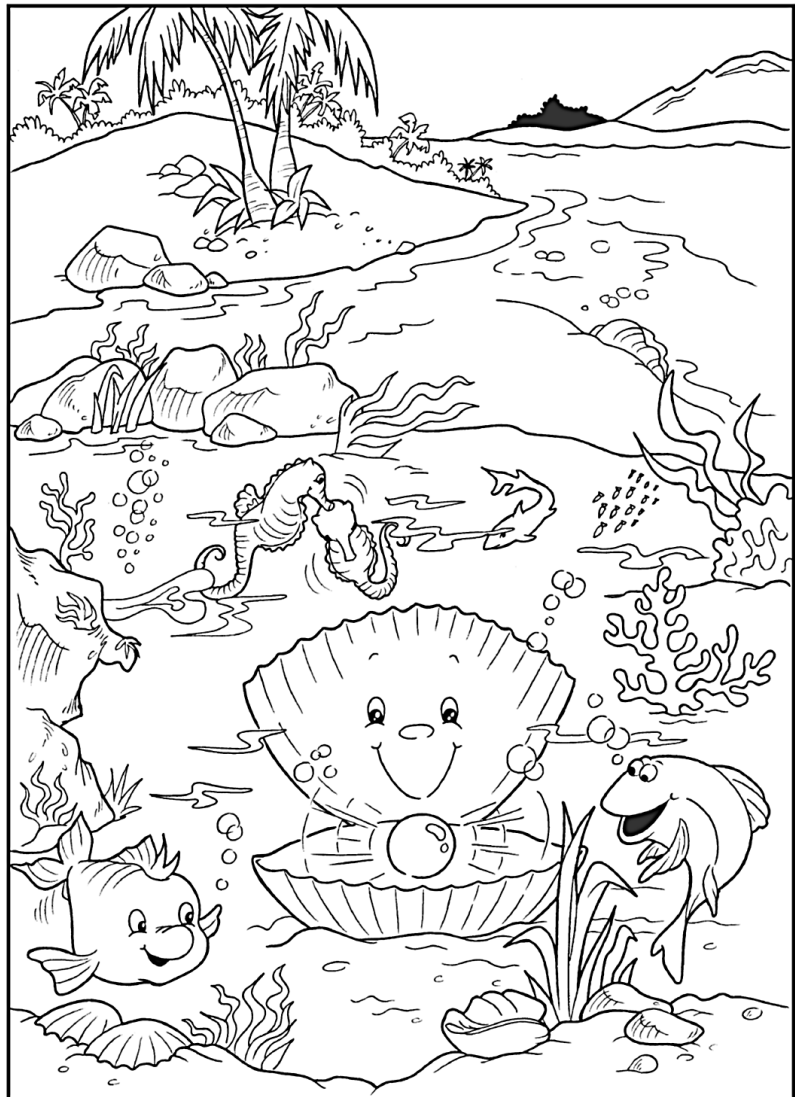
The oyster

An oyster on the ocean floor opened wide its shell to let the water pass over it. As the water flushed through, its gills picked out food, sending it to its stomach. Suddenly a large fish nearby stirred up a

cloud of sand and silt with a flip of its tail. Sand! Oh, how the oyster disliked sand. It was so rough and made life so unpleasant and uncomfortable and was such a bother whenever any got inside its shell. Quickly the oyster slammed its shell shut, but it was too late. One hard gritty grain of sand had gotten in and lodged itself between his inner flesh and his shell.

My, how that piece of sand bothered the oyster! But almost immediately, special glands God had given him for coating the inside of his shell began working to coat the irritating grain of sand with a lovely smooth and shiny covering. Year after year the oyster added a few more layers of the coating onto the tiny grain of sand until at last, it had produced a beautiful lustrous pearl of great value.

Sometimes the problems we have are a bit like that grain of sand. They bother us and we wonder why we have the irritation and inconvenience they can be. But the grace of God begins to work a wonder with our problems and weaknesses, if we let Him. Like blessings in disguise, the Lord soon takes the rough pieces of sand in our life and turns them into precious pearls of strength and power



The life-saving fire

One chilly winter morning, a fishing fleet launched out from a small harbor on the east coast of Newfoundland. In the afternoon there arose a great storm. When night settled, not a single vessel of all the fleet had found its way back into port.

All night long, wives, mothers, children, and sweethearts paced up and down the windswept beach, wringing their hands and calling on God to save their lost loved ones. To add to the horror of the situation, one of their cottages caught fire. Since the men were away, it was impossible to put out the blaze and save it.

When morning broke, to the joy of all, the entire fleet had returned safely to harbor in the bay. But there was one face which was a picture of despair—the wife of the man whose home had been destroyed in the fire. Meeting her husband as he landed, she cried, "Oh, Honey, we are ruined! Our home and everything in it was destroyed by fire!"

But the man exclaimed to her surprise, "Thank God for that fire! It was the light of our burning cottage that safely guided the whole fleet into port!"



*** Through Jesus we receive forgiveness**

Psalm 103:8-12—The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 86:5—For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.

Lamentations 3:22-23—Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

Ephesians 1:7—In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:12—I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

*** His love is unchanging and never-ending**

Matthew 28:20b—Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Isaiah 54:10 - For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

Malachi 3:6a—For I am the Lord, I do not change.

Hebrews 13:5b—Be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Hebrews 13:8—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Praise the Lord! He remains the same—faithful, always trustworthy, always there, always solving every problem, answering every need!

I Love You—Just you

From Jesus with love

I love you as if you were the only one. My love is reaching out to you right now. My love, My forgiveness, and My mercy are all right there, just for you, if you will only receive them.

I love you just the way you are. I am not stacking up all your faults and failures and mistakes to hold against you. I see only the good, and I see possibilities that others do not see.

I see your every tear. I hear your every cry. I feel your every frustration, your every worry, your every burden, your every desire. I know everything about you—all your wants, all your lacks. I see straight through to your heart of hearts and all that is in it, and I deeply love you.

I long to hold you close. I am right there by your side, and I will never, ever forsake you.

