

Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God

Long Story Short



Marty Machowski

Foreword by Dave Harvey



“There are many great devotionals out there. Most seem to fall short in two very key areas: theological richness and Christ-centeredness. This devotional will connect those who use it to both the historical biblical stories and the Jesus of the stories. Schools of all types, families, and local assemblies will do well to utilize this resource. This is both comprehensive and accessible.”

Dr. Eric M. Mason, Lead Pastor, Epiphany Fellowship, Philadelphia, PA

“Marty Machowski has written the family devotional that many busy dads need—a user-friendly family worship guide. Each day provides Bible readings, food for thought, and talking points to use with the kids. This stuff is simple without being shallow. It is doctrinally sound, Christ-centered, and full of gospel grace and hope. What more could you want? Don’t wait! Start using this book today!”

Dr. Tedd Tripp, Pastor; conference speaker; best-selling author of *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*

“Again and again, and much to our disappointment, Luella and I would look for a solid, Scripture-centered, gospel-driven devotional to use with our children. This type of family worship resource was simply not available then. So, it is with much enthusiasm that I recommend *Long Story Short*. Through this tool your children will not only come to know the narrative of redemption, told in the pages of the Bible, but they will encounter the chief actor in that narrative, the Lord Jesus Christ. Again and again they will be confronted with their desperate need for his grace. What more could you want from a family devotional?”

Paul David Tripp, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; pastor; seminary professor; best-selling author of eleven books

“What a good idea...a family devotional book that creatively takes your kids through the Bible one step at a time. Thank you, Marty, for this terrific idea. It’s a must-buy for every Christian home.”

Dr. Robert Wolgemuth, Speaker; best-selling author of nineteen books

“In *Long Story Short*, Marty Machowski provides what my wife and I needed when we were struggling to find good tools to disciple our young children. We got by, but this resource would have helped us so much. I envy the parents who will have it available to them. It is simple, interactive, and faithful to Scripture. It avoids the pitfalls of moralism that is prevalent in much of the children’s Bible literature today. Marty insists that you and your children meet Jesus and see the gospel of grace in every story. I can’t recommend this resource enough.”

Dr. Timothy S. Lane, Executive Director, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation; coauthor of *How People Change* and *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*

“Long Story Short is a wonderful concept and a practical, gospel-focused resource for family worship. It will help parents consistently give their children the Word of Life as they continually point them to the One who is Life. I also recommend it for grandparents and teachers—for all who love children and want to show them the gospel story in all of Scripture.”

Susan Hunt, Author; mother; grandmother; pastor’s wife; former director of Women’s Ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America

“Marty has his pulse on the hectic rhythm of modern family life in this new resource for deepening a family’s encounter with God through Scripture. His simple pattern of breathing in—with remembering and discovering Scripture—and breathing out, through talking about it, echoes the rich patterns of our tradition in easily accessible terms. As families disintegrate around us, this guide will help families be bound closer together through a common story and language of faith. Remember it, think about it, talk about it, and pray about it. Children will benefit from not only the content of this book, but the simple pattern of daily encounters can be a pattern for godly decision making as adults.”

Dr. Philip D. Schroeder, Church Consultant; associate director of Connectional Ministries, North Georgia Conference of the UMC; author of *Children’s Sermons for the Revised Common Lectionary: Using the 5 Senses to Tell God’s Story*

“As a parent I have tried many different resources for devotions with my children. *Long Story Short* is by far the best material available for parents who want a brief, biblical, interesting, and gospel-centered approach to taking children through the Scriptures. The kids love it! And I love it! Marty Machowski has created a resource that will help parents fulfill the biblical obligation of Ephesians 6:4!”

Kenneth Maresco, Executive Pastor, Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, MD

Long Story Short

Ten-Minute Devotions
to Draw Your Family to God

Old Testament

Marty Machowski



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I would like to dedicate this volume to my father,
TED MACHOWSKI,
whose humility and love for Jesus stands
as a tremendous example before me and my children.
No man has had a greater impact on my life.

Table of Contents

Foreword	<i>viii</i>	Week 18: Jacob's Dream	<i>117</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>x</i>	Week 19: Jacob and Rachel	<i>124</i>
Introduction for Parents	<i>1</i>	Week 20: Jacob Flees from Laban	<i>131</i>
Week 1: God Creates the World	<i>9</i>	Week 21: Jacob's Wrestling Match	<i>137</i>
Week 2: God Creates Man	<i>15</i>	Week 22: Joseph's Dream	<i>143</i>
Week 3: Adam and Eve Disobey God	<i>21</i>	Week 23: Joseph Is Attacked by His Brothers	<i>150</i>
Week 4: Cain and Abel	<i>27</i>	Week 24: Joseph Interprets the Dreams	<i>157</i>
Week 5: God Chooses Noah	<i>33</i>	Week 25: God Provides for the Israelites in Famine	<i>163</i>
Week 6: The Rainbow of God's Promise	<i>39</i>	Week 26: Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers	<i>170</i>
Week 7: The Tower of Babel	<i>46</i>	Week 27: God Protects Baby Moses	<i>176</i>
Week 8: Abram and God's Promise	<i>52</i>	Week 28: God Calls Moses	<i>183</i>
Week 9: God Makes a Covenant with Abram	<i>58</i>	Week 29: Moses Confronts Pharaoh	<i>190</i>
Week 10: God Gives Abram a New Name	<i>64</i>	Week 30: God Sends Plagues against Egypt	<i>197</i>
Week 11: The Lord Appears to Abraham	<i>71</i>	Week 31: The Last Plague and the First Passover	<i>204</i>
Week 12: God Rescues Lot	<i>78</i>	Week 32: God Parts the Red Sea	<i>210</i>
Week 13: Isaac and Ishmael	<i>85</i>	Week 33: God Provides Food and Water for Israel	<i>217</i>
Week 14: Abraham Is Tested	<i>92</i>	Week 34: God Gives Moses the Ten Commandments	<i>224</i>
Week 15: God Provides a Wife for Isaac	<i>99</i>		
Week 16: Jacob and Esau	<i>105</i>		
Week 17: Jacob's Lie	<i>111</i>		

Week 35: The Tabernacle	231	Week 57: David and Goliath	380
Week 36: The Golden Calf	237	Week 58: The Ark of God	387
Week 37: God Has Mercy on Israel	244	Week 59: David the Psalmist	394
Week 38: The People of Israel Complain	251	Week 60: Solomon and the Temple of God	401
Week 39: Miriam	258	Week 61: The Kingdom Is Divided	408
Week 40: Israel Spies Out the Land	264	Week 62: God Provides for Elijah in Miraculous Ways	416
Week 41: Moses Disobeys God	271	Week 63: Elijah and the Prophets of Baal	423
Week 42: God Heals Israel with a Bronze Snake	278	Week 64: Elijah Is Taken Up to Heaven	430
Week 43: Rahab's Help	284	Week 65: Elisha's Ministry	437
Week 44: Jericho Falls	291	Week 66: Naaman Is Cured	444
Week 45: Israel and Ai	298	Week 67: The Fall of Israel	451
Week 46: God Calls Gideon	305	Week 68: Good King, Bad King	457
Week 47: Gideon's Victory	312	Week 69: Jonah and Nineveh	464
Week 48: God Gives Samson Strength	319	Week 70: Josiah, the Eight-Year- Old King	471
Week 49: Samson Loses His Strength	325	Week 71: The Fall of Jerusalem	478
Week 50: Ruth	332	Week 72: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream	485
Week 51: God Hears Hannah's Prayers	339	Week 73: Four Men in the Furnace	492
Week 52: God Calls Little Samuel	345	Week 74: The Glory Belongs to God Alone	499
Week 53: The God of Israel Cannot Be Captured	352	Week 75: Daniel in the Lions' Den	506
Week 54: Israel Demands a King	359	Week 76: The Exiles Return	513
Week 55: Saul Disobeys the Lord	366	Week 77: The Temple Is Completed	520
Week 56: God Chooses a New King	373	Week 78: Nehemiah	527

Foreword

By Dave Harvey

One of my kids just got home. It was an evening of pizza, with a little soul surgery on the side—compliments of one Marty Machowski, the guy who wrote this book. My wife Kimm and I discovered a long time ago that raising teens is a community project—which is what brings me back to Marty.

Marty loves my family. He's loved them since the day each of them was born. He's loved my family as their children's ministry pastor at our church, where he has labored for the past twenty-two years. He's loved my wife and kids by being a friend and counselor to me, as I led Covenant Fellowship Church for almost two decades. And he loves them now by producing this extraordinary project.

But here's the thing: he loves your family too. In fact, he values them so much that he wants to connect something he treasures to the family you love. Marty wants to take the Bible and put it in the hands of parents...so they in turn can train their kids. But I'm not talking about generic Bible stories with moral lessons attached. I'm talking about showing kids the glorious gospel from every page of the Bible. It takes a special gift to be able to do that. Just check out a few of the lessons. You'll see—Marty Machowski has that gift.

Here's why you and your kids need this material:

It's proven. In other words, Marty didn't just go away on a personal retreat and come up with these lessons. This material has been field-tested over many years, in a growing number of churches. It's been picked apart and polished; now it's being published. That's a serious gift to the next generation.

It's sound. Marty is not first a children's ministry director. He is a pastor. That means he knows the challenges of kids and their families. Marty understands that spiritual health flows from sound doctrine. So he has taken great pains to make sure that Scripture is carefully interpreted and plainly applied. But believe me, these lessons are not

dry or disconnected. They follow the storyline of Scripture right to the Savior.

It's simple. Just think about it: straightforward and relatable lessons for ten minutes a day, five days a week. Over time, that adds up. And because it's the Bible, it will be a catalyst for change in children's lives.

It was wise of you to pick up this book. Now let me encourage you to start the journey with your kids. Marty has given us the tool. Let's use it to help build the next generation!

Acknowledgments

As this devotional goes to print, I am deeply thankful to Dave Harvey for his encouragement to develop and publish this material and for his support in writing the foreword for this book. I would also like to thank the pastors of Covenant Fellowship Church for their example, which has taught me how to live out the gospel in ministry and life, and the members of our church for their encouragement.

The completion of this devotional would not have been possible if not for the faithful service of all those who participated in the editing and production of the manuscript through the years of its development. Bill Patton, Michelle Janes, Sarajane Orlando, and Janel Feldman all helped in the early editing process, while my wife Lois and Jared Mellinger read through my draft manuscript. I would also like to thank Charity Campbell for her administration and skills so helpful behind the scenes.

I am very grateful for the folks at New Growth for their investment and commitment to provide solid biblical resources for families and churches. Finally, I would like to thank Jeff Gerke for his skillful editing work to help transform deep biblical truth into easy-to-understand weekly studies.



Introduction for Parents

A few years ago, to my wife's great delight, her father gave her the family heirloom photo albums. We're not talking snapshots of Disney World held in vinyl pages. These hundred-year-old photos were carefully bound in two deeply embossed gilded leather albums. Even guests who had parted the pages of these regal books had stood in awe of the history represented in the sepia tone portraits of her great-grandfathers, aunts, and uncles. Some family heirlooms are quite valuable, like a fine antique piece of furniture, yet families wouldn't think of selling them. They safeguard them to be passed to the next generation.

In the same way, every Christian parent holds another treasure to pass along. It is the most important treasure we steward, one of surpassing value: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul spoke of the treasure of the gospel when he told the Ephesians:

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6–7 NIV)

“Incomparable riches” is the way Paul described the gospel of grace. Is there anything of greater value we have to pass along?

Like our family treasures, we can't take the gospel for granted, but need to safeguard it and deliver it unaltered to the next generation. Just think: God has entrusted us parents with the privilege of passing this most valuable truth to the next generation! The message of salvation through faith alone, in Christ's atoning sacrifice alone, by sovereign grace alone, cannot be assumed.

A man-centered gospel is always threatening to supplant the cross-centered gospel we read in the Bible. But if we trade Jesus, who

bore our sins and received the wrath of God, for a Jesus who is merely a good example, we don't have the same gospel. If we remove a call to repentance and replace it with an invitation to be God's friend, we're not passing on the treasure of the gospel in accordance with the Scriptures.

So we, as parents, must ensure that the gospel we pass on is the authentic diamond we were handed, not a pretty glass imitation. We don't want to pass on merely the worldly knowledge that will *inform* their lives; we want to pass on the biblical truth that can *transform* their lives. Though teachers in school or church can help us, passing on the truth of God's Word is our unique responsibility as parents.

Getting Started

This devotional is written to present a biblical gospel from cover to cover. It is intended to aid you in passing this treasure on to your children.

Few Christian parents would disagree with the importance of passing on the truth of the gospel to their children, yet we live in a busy world where our lives are filled with distractions. Just getting all the tasks of the day checked off our list can leave any parent exhausted. It is easy to see how, though we have a desire to pass on the truth of the gospel, we can't find the time. Schedules collide, there is homework and yard work and dishes and laundry, the car's oil should be changed, there are phone calls to make...and before you know it, everyone is getting to bed late again. On top of that, our sinful natures can think of a hundred reasons why any given time is not a good time for family Bible study.

That is where I hope *Long Story Short* will help. The Bible can seem like a long story, but when you break it down into short devotions, teaching the Bible to your family is easy to do. The goal of this devotional is to, day by day, pass on a clear gospel message showing our children how every story in the Bible points forward or back to the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's story of salvation.

You won't find a more important focus for a family devotional than a daily highlighting of the gospel of grace. Why? Simply put, the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Clever stories and good moral lessons may entertain and even help our children, but the gospel will transform our

children. The gospel is deep enough to keep the oldest and wisest parents learning and growing all their lives, yet simple enough to transform the heart of your first grader who has just begun to read.

All You Need Is Ten Minutes a Day!

If you can find ten minutes a day, you can use this tool to pass on the most valuable treasure the world has ever known. Contrary to what many believe, daily family Bible study need not take a lot of time. God can use a short, simple family devotion, consistently practiced over time, to yield more fruit in the lives of our children than we realize; and a quick daily devotion is not as easily derailed by our busy schedules. Each day, as the gospel is presented, God is at work.

Our hope in God is to see our children reading their Bibles and having devotions on their own, not because they have to, but because they want to. The truth of God's Word brings us to Christ and is effective to sustain us and help us to grow all of our days. There is simply no greater delight for Christian parents than watching the Spirit of God guiding their children through faith-filled study of God's Word. No earthly treasure compares.

God's Word, when hidden in our hearts as children, is used again and again in our lives later on. The Spirit of God will bring it back to our minds to help us in our walk with God and to enable us to encourage others we meet along the way.

Every family can find a few minutes in the daily routine. Some families gather for their devotional at the start of their day; others try the dinnertime approach. Lay the devotional book and your Bible(s) beside your plate on the dinner table. As soon as everyone is finished eating, take ten minutes for family devotions. *Long Story Short* does the work for you! All you need to do is read the passage of Scripture for the day, follow that with the short commentary, and then ask the listed questions. Finish it all up by inviting one of your children to pray.

It's Simple to Use

Long Story Short is a family devotional program designed to explain God's plan of salvation from Genesis through Revelation. Volume 1 covers the Old Testament and volume 2, the New Testament. Together,

they provide three years of family devotions! For every Old Testament lesson, your family will learn the answer to the question, “How does this passage point forward to Jesus?” For every New Testament lesson, the question is, “Where is the gospel?” Since the Bible is the story of God’s unfolding plan of redemption, every passage of Scripture points forward or back to Calvary.

Each week starts off with a creative activity, exercise, or bit of trivia to introduce the passage. On days one through four you review a portion of the week’s Scripture passage. Special attention is given on day three to connect the current passage to the gospel. On day four we’ve added a question for your older children to ask you, and on day five you and your family will investigate a Bible passage from the book of Psalms or an excerpt from one of the prophets to discover how the passage points forward to Christ.

This devotional book can be used differently depending on the ages of your children. Since this program is rich in gospel truth, it works for families with children of all ages. Take a look at the following categories to find the one that best describes your family.

If Your Children Are Preschoolers

The best time to start consistent daily devotions is with children in the four- through six-year-old age group. *Long Story Short* works wonderfully with children in this age group. Don’t be fooled by your five-year-old’s inability to answer the listed questions. Children at this age can often understand much more than they can express. Consider some of the following techniques:

- Feel free to skip the discussion questions and just read the answers. The questions for each of the day’s devotions have answers in complete sentences. Consider using the devotional time as a familiarization of the Bible this first time through. If your child starts the program at age four, he or she will finish three years later at age seven with a tremendous foundation of gospel truth that has accumulated day by day and week by week.
- You can also skip over the creative introductions and save them for a second time through when your children reach grade school.

- ∴ Try rephrasing the questions to make them very simple or by making them multiple choice.
- ∴ Another parent can be the helper, actually whispering the answers to your children. This might sound dishonest, but in reality it is the repetition that helps them remember the material.
- ∴ You can make up simple questions for your toddlers yourself. Basic questions about the characters such as, “Who was the man who led Israel out of Egypt?” are great for younger children.

If Your Children Are in Grade School

Elementary school age is the time to call for your children to participate with you in family devotions. Some children might be reluctant at first, but persistence soon pays off. Even the most challenging child is able to handle ten minutes a day. Remember, day by day they are being exposed to the gospel truth God uses to transform lives. The creative introductions at the beginning of each week will pique the interest of your children. Read them yourself a day or so ahead to give you time to gather any objects needed for the lesson.

Start by making sure all your children have a Bible. You might have toddlers mixed in with your grade school students. That’s okay. Just have them open up their toddler Bibles to the right page (that means anywhere close). Read through the passage for the day. On days when the passage is shorter, try having your older children read. (Remember, labored reading won’t encourage them or the others, so wait until your children can read well before passing that responsibility to them.) If you have toddlers in the mix, let them come along for the ride but don’t cater to their lower learning level. All day long they are learning by watching the older children in their daily routines. They learn about God the same way.

Read the passage, the short paragraph summary, and then move to the questions. Here are a few ideas to consider to make your discussion time work well:

- ∴ After asking a question to your family, look back in the passage and tell them which verse to look for to find the answer.

- ∴ Encourage all attempts to answer the question, even if they miss the answer.
- ∴ Consider inviting children to add to their brothers' and sisters' answers. Sometimes children who are reluctant to start an answer can add to an answer to expand it.
- ∴ Don't be afraid to call on your older children. If they seem stumped even after you tell them which verse they can find the answer in, give them clues.

Finish by asking your children to pray. Help your youngest children by having them repeat after you. As your children grow older, encourage them to pray on their own. Always help them along if they get stuck. Soon, they will be praying on their own without your help.

If Your Children Are Moving out of Grade School

The *Long Story Short* program works well with older grade school children and young teens too! They set a wonderful example for their younger brothers and sisters in answering the questions and even leading the devotions themselves.

If you have a teen who thinks the Bible studies are too easy or boring, try this exercise. Open up randomly to one of the devotions and start asking him (or her) a few questions. He is sure to find out, like we all have in our lives, that everybody needs to review.

Try some of the following ideas with your older children:

- ∴ Use your older children to lead the creative introductions at the beginning of each week with their younger brothers and sisters.
- ∴ Try holding your older children in reserve, allowing the younger children to answer first. Then have the older children amplify the answers their younger siblings gave.
- ∴ Pair up a younger child with an older child and allow the older child to help give the answer to his younger brother or sister. This might sound like cheating, but the value is in hearing and remembering the details of the gospel over and over.
- ∴ Consider where your children are in their lives on a given day. Feel the freedom to add a more subjective question to draw them out about how the passage relates to their lives personally.

Questions like, “What does God want to teach you from reading this passage?” can be used for any lesson.

- ∴ If your mix of children includes a teen, assign him (or her) to lead the devotions once a week. Encourage him to read the passage and the devotion a day in advance to become familiar with what is being asked. If you pull him aside later and offer some encouragement, he will be all the more eager to lead devotions again.

Remember, the devotional is designed to work through simple repetition over time. If you skip a day, that’s okay, just pick up where you left off.

Reaping the Harvest

One day my wife, Lois, and I will hand the family photo albums we received from her father down to one of our children and, with them, pass along a portion of our family legacy. That day will be sweeter indeed if the life of the child we pass them to has been transformed by the gospel. Though we know we can’t save our children, we *can* keep them soaking in the gospel. And as we do, we have this confidence: God is able and willing to save them.

As you faithfully lead your children through the devotions in this book, don’t just read it as history. It is history, but it is so much more! Lead with expectation that the God of history will visit with your family. Wait and watch to see what God will do! Cling with faith to this hope, that through the gospel proclamation in your home, the Holy Spirit will regenerate the hearts of your children and lead them to faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone!

Week 1

God Creates the World

Pick a leaf off a plant and show it to your children. Ask them what it is and what it tells us. Draw them out for a short while. Hold the leaf in your fingers and say, “One little leaf is all we need to know that God is real. Paul tells us in the book of Romans that everyone can see God’s power and knows that he is real by looking at the things God made. Every plant leaf is made up of millions of cells that use sunlight and water to make sugar for the plant to use for food! This week you will learn about God’s marvelous creation.”

DAY ONE

Picture It

If you brought home a goldfish, how would you set up the aquarium? What color gravel would you use for the bottom? Perhaps you would put in a few underwater plants, and stack up a larger rock or two so the goldfish had a little place to hide. You could create a world for your goldfish and set it up any way you want.

That’s what God did for us when he created our world. He made mountains, rivers, trees, and everything else. The first part of the Bible tells the story of how God created the world we live in special, just for us!



Read Genesis 1:1–2.

Think about It Some More

Who was the only one around before the world began? That’s right, God was alive before the creation of the world. In fact, God has always been alive. That means God doesn’t have a birthday. No

matter how far back in time you go, God was there. He is the one who decided to create our world. Way back then, there was no world at all. God is so powerful that he was able to make everything we can see out of nothing at all!

Imagine what it would have been like to watch God create our earth out of nothing! God is amazing. There is only one God and nobody can do the things he can do.

Talk about It

- ∴ What did God use to create the world? *(God didn't use anything at all. He made it out of nothing by his mighty power.)*
- ∴ Can we make anything out of nothing? *(No, only God can create something out of nothing.)*
- ∴ If you could make something out of nothing, what would you make? *(Help your children use their imaginations to think of something. Then explain to them that God used his imagination to make all that we see.)*
- ∴ How can we thank God for creating our world? *(We can thank God by taking care of what he has given us, praising him for all that he made, and obeying his commands.)*



Pray about It

Praise the Lord for creating such a beautiful world for us to live in.

DAY TWO

Remember It

What do you remember about yesterday's story? What do you think is going to happen today?



Read Genesis 1:3–25.

Think about It Some More

Did you notice that God created the stars and planets and everything in the earth and waters—just by speaking? Everything God wanted, he commanded with his voice and it appeared and came to life!

When God said, “Let there be light,” light suddenly appeared. That is true for everything you can see that is a part of the earth.

Nobody else can create things just by speaking. Go ahead and try if you think you can. But you will soon find that no matter how loud you shout, you won’t be able to create anything the way God does.

Talk about It

- ∴ See if you can count how many times God created things by speaking in our story. *(Parents, help your children find all the times the words “God said” occur in today’s Bible passage.)*
- ∴ What is your favorite thing God made by speaking? *(Parents, help your children look back at the passage, or list the items God made if your children are too young to read.)*
- ∴ Did you know that God has given us the ability to create too? For instance, painters create beautiful paintings. And people can make things like houses and cars out of all that God created. But the way we create is different from how God creates. Can you tell the difference between how we make things and how God made things? *(We cannot create by speaking—we have to use our hands or some part of our body—and everything we make has to be made from something else.)*



Pray about It

Thank God for the way he can create by the command of his voice.

DAY THREE

Connect It to Jesus

Can anyone guess how our story is about Jesus or points forward to him?



Read Colossians 1:15–17.

Think about It Some More

Although the Bible was written by men, God inspired the words they wrote. That means he was working by his Spirit while they were writing to help them know what they should write. That is how the apostle Paul could write about God creating the world even though it happened before he was born.

In today's Bible reading, Paul tells us something about God's creation that we didn't know before. He tells us that God the Son, Jesus, is the one who was doing the creating. It was Jesus who made the world we live in. Jesus created everything we see around us. Paul said it was created by him and it was all created for him.

Talk about It

- ∴ God made so many amazing animals. Which animals do you like most?
- ∴ If you were in charge of the creation, instead of Jesus being in charge, is there anything you would do differently? Would you put a lake right outside your home? Would you make it snow more often where you live? *(Parents, help the kids get creative here. Then remind them that God gave us creativity as one of the ways he made us like him.)*
- ∴ Why doesn't the moon fall apart? How do the stars stay floating in the sky? Here is a hint: God gives us the answer in verse 17. Who does the Bible say is holding all the creation together? *(Verse 17 tells us that Jesus is holding the whole world together.)*



Pray about It

Thank Jesus for creating our world and holding it all together.

DAY FOUR

Remember It

What has God been teaching you this week through our Bible story?



Read Genesis 1:26–31.

Think about It Some More

After creating our world—with all its plants and animals, the sun, the moon, and all the millions of stars—God said that everything he had made was good. But he wasn't finished yet. God saved the best part of his creating for last.

The most special part of his creation was to form man “in his own image.” That means man would be able to do some of the things only God could do and be similar to God. After creating man, God put him in charge of all of God's creation and told him to rule over it. Because man was made in God's image he could do things that none of the other animals could do. He could talk with God, worship God, and have a friendship with God.

Talk about It

- ● KIDS, ask your parents to tell you all the ways
- ● they can think of that show how men and women are different from animals. See if you can think of some they miss.

(Man was made in God's image and is the only part of the creation that can talk with God, worship him, and have a relationship with him. Man can also create things like painting, machines, and music.)

- ∴ Before God made man, he said that everything he had made was good. What did God say after he made man? *(Parents, if your children can't find the answer—“very good”—have them look in verse 31.)*
- ∴ What is one very important way in which we are not like God? *(We were created; God is the creator. God has been around forever, but we have a starting point.)*



Pray about It

Thank God for making us like him so we can pray and worship him.

DAY FIVE

Discover It

Today is the day we look at a different Bible passage—from the book of Psalms or one of the prophets—to see what we can learn from it about Jesus or our salvation.



Read Psalm 1.

Think about It Some More

At first, you might not think Psalm 1 points to Jesus, but take another look. Psalm 1 is about a man who lives for God all the time. It says this man delights in God's Word in the daytime and in the nighttime. While we all should try to live this way, there is only one man who ever lived this way every day of his whole life. That man is Jesus, the one who created our earth. Even when God changes our hearts and we try to follow God, we don't do it all the time. We fail. But Jesus never failed.

Talk about It

- ∴ What does Psalm 1 tell us we should do all day and all night? (*We should delight in God's Word.*)
- ∴ What does it mean to delight in God's Word? (*To help your children understand the word delight, ask them what they think it means to delight in ice cream. To delight in ice cream you need to eat it up, love its flavor, and wish you could have some more. That is what we do with God's Word. We read it, enjoy what it says, and we can't wait to read it some more.*)
- ∴ Can children who can't read delight in God's Word? (*Yes, if they listen carefully when their parents read the Bible, they can delight in God's Word too.*)



Pray about It

Ask God to help each person in your family to delight in God's Word.