

MisSion CriTikal

Tents, Teens, 'n Truth

The heart of a couple teenagers, for missions develops into an adventure on a zero budget. They begin without any special training, tools, or specific plan – just a burden and the Great Commission directive listed in Matthew 28.

This eduventure could actually happen with some teens you know, at a hilltop mission spot you could begin praying at. Heaven has all the provisions, promises, and hurting souls just waiting for you to see yourself entering an open door. Whether you can lead, faithfully follow, or just join hands in praying and promoting such a mission, MisSion CriTikal will shed light on your place of service to be blessed as only Heaven knows how.

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You'll get a new heart and maybe even a fancy set of clothes.

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He thought, well maybe you have to be in the right place to write a lesson. He found a piece of cardboard and part of a broken pencil that he sharpened on the edge of a rock. His 8 yr old mind thought, his big sister needed a Story Spot to teach her lessons, maybe if he had a Sproutin' Spot, that would help his written lessons to sprout. The ideal Sproutin' Spot had to be the small area on the hillside a few feet from the mission tent and the boxed in Story Spot.

Sitting indian fashion next to the little seedlings just starting to poke their sprouts above the ground had to be the perfect Sproutin' Spot for writing lessons. It was then something odd happened – nobody would ever have imagined – even an 8 yr old. Almost like it was guided by a heavenly force, the pencil starting drawing a small picture of the starting of the tent mission. It showed a young boy laying sticks all in line to form a box.

Willy could see the boy was himself. The next small picture showed his best friend Lenny spreading out the tent that fit exactly inside the box of sticks in the first picture. The next picture showed the tent with the tablecloth patches.

As you read these words, imagine the little storyboard pictures that begin to appear on the cardboard – telling the story of how to start a God-honoring mission with nothing except what God has placed around you. At the same time the lessons with drawings grow to fill the cardboard, in Heaven there is an angel with needle and thread, fashioning a set of fine clothes that will exactly fit a young artist teacher in his Sproutin' Spot.

An important lesson about teaching is that you Go With Whatcha Got – what God has placed around you. It can be sticks and a torn tent, cardboard and broken pencil – or it can even be a needle and thread. Get in a Sproutin' Spot and open your heart to God's will and He'll work in your heart.

stories and lessons at the Sunday afternoon Story Spot. He often noticed the attention and admiration on the faces of the village children (teens included) as his big sister taught lessons about God's love for young people. He got the bug, or rather burden to teach, in God's vast classroom of souls.

But he was sort-of handicapped. He thought of himself as handicapped by his age. After all, nobody listens to an 8 year old; especially when they learn this 8 yr old lives in a ramshackle tin metal shack. The thing is, though, every 8 yr old anywhere on planet Earth needs to be continually reminded that God listens, often when nobody else will – He listens with a loving heart. And also, God assigns angels to protect them.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 18:10.)

This burden to teach didn't go away. His young mind couldn't quite piece it all together, but he often imagined he could become someone kind-of important by some things he would teach. He never told anyone, even his mom or big sister his odd idea. During his quiet moments, he'd look at his clothes that anyone would call rags and imagine they'd become fancy dress clothes, like maybe a fairytale movie would portray. His imagination would say that he'd pay for the fancy clothes by teaching. Sure it seemed very odd, but it was his odd dream that never went away.

Then there was a big problem with his teaching dream. He didn't want to talk to teach, like his sister Lyla did. He wanted to write down his lessons so his 'students' could learn at their own speed. That's where the real problem lay – he couldn't write any better than a weasel and he wouldn't know how to start.

#14 – Mission Quartet

Daenum noticed that three teens from the village were coming to the Story Spot each Sunday afternoon quite regular. More than that, occasionally one or two of them would take brief tours of the Mission Critikal site, being respectful of all the things in the area. There were even moments when the teens would just hang around the area after all the younger Story Spot youth had returned to their homes. Dae saw the opportunity, and acted.

He arranged with the three teen regulars to meet with them before noon the following Sunday. In the tent at the prearranged time the three teens met with Dae and Lenny. The four teens sat on the ground facing Dae, a teen himself.

Dae held up a small cardboard box for each of them to clearly see. He specifically showed each teen a different side of the same box. He then asked each teen to describe 'his side of the box'.

Because each side had different markings, each of the descriptions was a little different. He then asked the teens which of their different descriptions was correct. The four agreed that all the descriptions were correct. In fact, adding the descriptions together actually gave a better description of the box.

Dae put that box on the ground behind him and picked up another small box with a different word on each of the sides of this new box. The first word was KING. The second was an OX. The third was MAN and the fourth was EAGLE. The teens easily agreed the best description of that box would include the four words on its sides. The KING side was assigned to Ben. The OX side was assigned to Andy. The MAN side was assigned to Ian and the fourth side to Lenny.

Like a quiz program, Dae made a fast response game

with the teen quartet as to their word to remember – king, ox, man, and eagle. Dae looked at Ben and said, “Ben, pretend you're a king. You're mostly interested in important people and the powerful ways they act around others. OK? You're a pretend king.” Next Dae looked at Andy and explained, “Andy, you're an ox. An ox is a powerful animal used to do farming and pull carts of people and things to places they need to go. Ya got it, Andy? You're an ox – a powerful servant to others.” Andy nodded that he understood that he was an ox – a servant that helped get important things done.

Dae spoke to Ian saying, “Ian, you're a man. I mean, you're pretending you are a perfect man. That takes some pretending, doesn't it?” he said with a slight grin. Next, he told Lenny, “Lenny, you're an eagle with powerful eyesight always flying around in a beautiful blue sky, watching all that goes on, beneath him, on the ground. With that, Dae quizzed each teen. They were required to explain their object and why they were important.

“Each of your descriptions of the king, ox, man, and eagle sides of the box helps us to understand more about the box, right?” After a pause, Dae held up the box in front of Ben, Andy, Ian, and Lenny and said, “OK, now. I want you to think of the box with these four sides as a person – one single person. So that as you describe your four sides and the associated object, you're actually describing a person; a very important person. In fact, the most important person the world knows anything about.”

“OK. We're going to associate a person's name to each of the four objects and then the name of the box. Ya with me?” All four teens nodded yes.

“Ben, you're the king. The name you'll remember is Matthew. Andy, you're the ox – the servant. The name you'll remember is Mark. Ian, you're the perfect man. The name you are to remember is Luke. And Lenny, you're the eagle with

become one of the judges or leaders in the next mud mountain contest.

Though Tom was totally blind, he spoke with such feeling everyone thought he was looking directly into their heart. He slowly explained the beginning of the detailed Bible process. He said, “The Bible begins with a basic list of all the struggles and hazards you and I face each day, all our lives. It then says we become more than conquerors as we put our trust, actions, and attitudes totally in Jesus Christ and His power and love for each of us.”

“Remember now, this is the only place that explains that we have this 'more than victorious' opportunity – it's in God's precious word. I'm a little hesitant to say it this way, but I hafta tell you the yummy verse that becomes the mountain peak promise to everyone that has made Jesus Christ their Lord and Master. In the last book of the Bible – Revelation, we're told we'll 'rule and reign with Him a thousand years.' I mean is that fantastic or what?.

“So, even better than being a winner at the Mud Mountain Meet, and then becoming a judge and leader in the next one, we'll get to rule and reign with our Lord Jesus Christ, a thousand years. That is, if we've truly invited Him into our life, and live for Him and His will for ever. - Wow! Knowing that, who wouldn't want to become saved and serve Him with all our heart?”

(Romans 8:35-37 and Revelation 20:6) [~]

#25 – Willy Words

Willy got the bug. “Workin' Willy”, some people might call him. Everyone knew him as the 8 yr old with a teen sister, named Lyly who taught the

trips. Ben must have not understood the idea of the contest. The other three began right away to start building their pile of mud – their mud mountain.

However, Ben had everyone really befuddled. Instead of starting on his pile, he spread out several large leaves and began putting his mud on the leaves. What is he doing? Is he going to make mud pies and start a bakery? Out of the corner of their eyes, the other three mud mountain builders were wondering what Ben had in mind.

The hot afternoon sun was almost baking Ben's mud pies on the leaves, as he began building his mud pile as the others had long-since started. He could see the others were having a real problem getting the oozing mud to stay in place. They'd stack more mud on the top, and it would just ooze out flat. Their mountain was growing out, not up.

With about 10 minutes left, Ben took his somewhat dry mud pies off the leaves and stacked them in a circle on edge, to form the wall of the lower portion of his mountain. This kept the oozy mud in place. He continued the process as his mud mountain grew taller.

Everyone could see Ben would be the winner – without question. As the contest ended, Ben was given a crown – made of a couple vines with many leaves. He took a smiling bow to everyone.

Ol' Tom had everyone sit Indian-fashion on the ground facing him, close by.

Tom explained that Ben won, using some clever planning. The dark-skinned Christian told about an odd phrase in the Bible, and no place else on earth. “...*more than conquerors*.” He said, “Ben was the winner, but how could he have become more than a winner? How could he become 'more than a conqueror'?”

Everyone looked at each other with the same blank 'I have no idea' expression. Tom explained the way to do it is to

great vision. The name you should remember is John.”

Dae did the quick response quizzing again, to test the names each teen needed to remember with their object. The teens all had fun with the quizzing.

Ian spoke up with, “Well we each got the name and object for each of the four sides. Tell us the name connected with the box. Who do these four objects describe.” Dae responded with, “That's a great question. The answer is – God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Just like the four sides of the box, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote a whole book describing their way of seeing Jesus Christ. We'll see more of this quartet next week. OK?”

What description of Jesus Christ, would you write? [~]

#15 – The Four of Three

Better than blackboards!” might be the statement of some teachers. But the ongoing statement of the tent mission teens always prevailed – “Do the best with what ya got!” More accurately though, would be “Do your best with what God gave you!”

That's the reason for the branches Lyla stuck in the ground at the front of the Story Spot near the tent; the tent that was becoming more of a worship center; a church, each week. The four branches in the Story Spot, each had three twigs to hang things on. This quartet of branches would soon be the focus of joy and laughter in the hearts of children so often filled with much sadness.

Teenager Lyla lived with her Mama and her 8 yr old brother - Willy, in one of the sheet metal shacks in the village at the bottom of the hill. She knew all the children that excitedly filled, and sometimes overflowed, the boxed in area known as the Story Spot, each Sunday afternoon.

The story times all started much the same way each week. The children, and a couple village teens, all sat on the ground quietly facing Lyla. She spoke, “Here we go. ONE – TWO – THREE!” Then in unison all the children shouted, “THANK YOU JESUS!” They all applauded, looking into the clouds. You could be sure Heaven heard, 'cuz many of the village mothers, heard the children's opening chorus and applause. Lyla can show you some of the sweetest choirs don't bother about sopranos, altos, and such. The melodies of the children often reach the farthest and most needy audiences too.

For the benefit of the very young children in the Story Spot chorus, Lyla had the children count the three twigs on each of the four branches, stuck in the ground. With more gusto than soldiers responding to a tough Army drill sergeant, the children counted the twelve twigs, out loud. That drill sergeant would have been proud of the unity of the children, all counting with Lyla.

The Story Spot lesson began. The teenage teacher hung a ragged piece of cardboard on the top twig of the first branch. It showed the word JESUS. The second twig held the word LOVES. The third twig on the first branch held the word ME. With all eyes watching every move Lyla made, she touched the cardboard JESUS and told the children that when they felt afraid or sad, remember that Jesus is watching and will hug them better than any grownup could. And to prove that Jesus cares about boys and girls, He left Heaven for a while and was born in the manger, so He would soon show the whole world He cares and protects.

Lyla then touched the LOVES cardboard and explained about the love that Jesus has for each of us – even when we do things that don't please Him.

The ME sign was removed from the branch and one at a time, was held against the chest of each child, by Lyla. It

very good reader, Mama helped to read the verse that was about feet; about beauty – it was actually about beautiful feet.”

The words were, “*How beautiful ...are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation...*” (Isaiah 52:7).

So often when our spirituality gets muddy, our loving Savior stands ready with fresh forgiveness, blessings, and Heaven's heart cleansing, our words can't begin to describe. [~]

#24 – Mud Mountain

THAT'S A WHOPPER OF AN IDEA!

The teens of Mission Critical Tent Mission may have thought that old people are just 'stick in the mud' folks that don't remember what excitement looks like any more. But Ol' Tom really lit a fire under the teens. “Let's have a Mud Mountain Meet,” was his brainstorm.

Tom knew that more than girls, boys are into construction, competition, loud, flashy, and certainly messy activities. Well, that's a great first description of a Mud Mountain Meet. But more than that, Ol' Tom had a hidden agenda - we'll learn about later.

The contestants had 60 minutes to create the tallest mountain of mud inside their assigned circle, using only pure mud, obtained from the creek bank about a stone's throw away. The meet would happen two days from today.

The meet began with a heart-felt prayer for God-honoring fun and safety, and maybe some lessons learned too. Toby banged the rusted out wash tub that started the race. The four contestants raced for the bank mud, their first of several

so much that she's helping, since our little group is growing and she seems to be enjoying it all as much as I do. I wanted to be a real leader to her. It would be great if I could show her right off that I knew what I was doing. But today I proved just the opposite with her.”

In Daenum's heart, he understood the disappointment she was feeling. He'd been there many times. He was an expert on having pity parties – long ones and short ones. His carefully chosen words were, “Lyla, God loves each of us so much He often calls us to examine how and why we do things - especially things for Him. He guides our examination of our own hearts. Many times it's not too tough to see areas of our attitudes that aren't really focused where they should be.”

“I hate to admit those heart exams that have shown me I've taken my focus off Him and onto myself. My words and thoughts seem to begin way too much with 'I this' and 'I that'. 'Me' and 'mine' words crowd out God-honoring attitudes and actions, and with that, Satan gets a big victory.”

They were interrupted by Dedee rushing back to the two teens and letting Lyla know she was needed. It was a perfect time for the children to have the closing Story Spot prayer before everyone headed home, knocking the dried mud off, as they walked.

Dae could tell that Lyla's prayer didn't have the level of praise and heavenward joy that it usually did. After the amen, the children began leaving. It was Dedee's little brother Timmy that went up to Lyla and began talking to her.

From the distance Dae saw Lyla and little Timmy kneel down and pray together. They continued speaking with eyes closed and head bowed. In a moment they both stood up and hugged. Timmy headed for home with a little skipping in his step.

Just as Lyla was starting for home, Dae handed her a little slip of paper with a verse on it. Because she wasn't a

was just a small but effective way for the children to see themselves on that bottom twig of the first branch – ME. There was never a better medicine for the heart of man, those three little words, JESUS LOVES ME.

The lesson continued with the three words on the next branch. THIS – I – KNOW. Lyla spoke about each of those three words. And then continued with the three words on the third branch, FOR – THE – BIBLE. Lyla passed the cardboard BIBLE sign around to each child, with the promise they'd be learning more about what a Bible is, next Sunday.

The final three word signs, TELLS – ME – SO, were explained to the Story Spot children. Lyla then took all the word signs off their twigs, mixed them up, and put them in a pile in the center of the children. She then asked for twelve volunteers to help. “What we're about to do, children, is super important. We want to be loving and do our best as we tell others about Jesus and His Bible. I need each of you volunteers, one at a time, to pick the top sign on the pile and hang it on the twig it's supposed to be on.”

The smartest man in the world, with words, couldn't describe the joy in Lyla's heart as she watched that little army of children carefully hanging their word sign where it went.

Little Toby's shoulder was hurting big time, but he asked if he could close in prayer. “Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me in the Bible, and changing me from being a throw-away kid. Amen.” [~]

#16 – Tent Church Glow

The golden surprise about to be seen couldn't have been imagined by the teens in the Mission Critikal tent church that Sunday morning.

Daenum had just begun his continued lesson about the

different ways the Bible writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John told about the life of Jesus Christ. All these were accurate but featured slightly different views of much of what the Son of God did here on Earth.

The flap of the tent was open when a lady's voice asked, "Can we come in?" Daenum stood to his feet and invited Lyla's Mama, her village friend Ruth, and Ol' Tom, as he was known by all the villagers. Ol' Tom was almost completely blind and not able to work with the few village men at the plantation three miles away. The blind man, and two ladies knew the three village teens listening to Daenum's lessons. Dae's teen friend Lenny was also there.

The three adults and four teens listened with interest as Dae spent about twenty minutes teaching what little he knew about the four Gospel writers. He then asked his seven listeners if they had something they'd like to share about God and His goodness.

Mama and Ruth thanked Dae and Lenny for their missionary efforts with the village children. Then Ol' Tom asked if he could share. "Certainly," was Dae's quick reply.

Tom began, "Before I had my accident that blinded me, I heard about a church in a tent. It was a famous tent that God gave the design for. Would you like me to share a little about it?"

Everyone said they'd be very interested. So Tom continued.

"Like I said, the design for this tent church came from God Himself. He had Moses teach the people how to build it, and how it was to be used. I guess now that I'm blind, I can better visualize what the insides must have been like. It had two rooms with the smaller room in back, that only one person was allowed in."

"This tent was constructed so that it could be easily taken apart, moved to a new place and then put back together. See, the idea is that everywhere people go or move to, God

#23 – Teens 'n Toes

Yet again the branches that outlined the Story Spot at the side of the mission tent had to be widened. More village children were regularly coming and enjoying every lesson and story.

Lyla was so happy to have her teen friend Dedee helping with the Sunday afternoon story times – especially the messy agenda planned for today.

Everyone removed their shoes and sandals. Part of Lyla's lesson stressed the similarity of the children's feet. The big toes were in the center for balance and fast moving forward. The small toes on the side allowed heavy loads in soft sandy soil and made for quick turns running.

Tickling the feet also emphasized the sensitive nerve endings that stimulated areas all over the body. God's design of our feet is beauty for sure. Lyla and Dedee tried their best to create some footprints on cardboard using mud, something like detectives taking fingerprints. The footprinting didn't work very good, although you couldn't tell it by the fun the children had, getting muddy from the knees down.

While Dedee led the happy children in playing their 'Jesus Loves Me' God game, Daenum noticed Lyla at the back of the group with a sad look on her face. He slowly walked over and sat down next to her, facing the children. In a soft tone without looking at her, he asked, "How's it goin'?"

Her reply stunned him. "I've failed the children. I know I have. And I feel like going home right now and hiding from everybody. What makes this all the more sickening is that I tried so hard 'cuz of my love for the children. I just can't make any sense of it all." Something in Dae's mind told him to remain silent, and let her get all of her hurt out.

"And Dae, then there's Dedee helping. I mean, I love

Bible pages but the dozen or so verses were quotes from Proverbs 3. The other writings seemed to be notes for a sermon preached.

Sunday morning, the three ladies from the village, and about 6 teens sat in the tent as Ol' Tom prayed and then began to share his heart. "I thank you for letting me share my heart with you this morning in our little mission. Lenny read to me some scripture and sermon notes that are a treasure of truth in themselves – they actually form a map for you and I to follow to obtain the riches of Heaven while we walk this earth.

Lenny read aloud the Proverbs verses and then Tom continued. I want to call your attention to just three steps we must make according to the treasure map Lenny just read to us. The first is *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding*. The key word here is TRUST." Tom explained how this trust gives us sure footing as we step into our faith in Jesus. "...and He shall direct thy paths. There's our map – simple, right?"

"Trust was first, now HONOR. *We are to honor the Lord with our substance-* with our possessions, our talents, and our work. The third step is to FEAR the Lord and depart from evil. Now listen close... everybody listening?" Everyone replied yes or nodded their head yes.

"Mostly you and I think of FEAR as how we feel when we're face to face with a vicious man-eating lion. We get scared and want to run. This fear is how we'd feel if we thought that Jesus left us alone and we couldn't call on Him anymore. So this treasure map in Proverbs directs our paths as we trust, fear, and honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Lenny, I think we ought to work on memorizing this treasure map so we can always share it with others. [~]

wants there to be a place they can come to worship Him, just like this mission tent you've put on this hill above our village. The name of this moveable church was called a Tabernacle. But God made it super clear the Tabernacle wasn't a clubhouse. In fact if the people didn't do things exactly the way He wanted it, God would strike them dead. That was one of the reasons why only certain church men were allowed to go into parts of it and do their part of the ceremonies.

I can just imagine the inside of the Tabernacle, with the table over there with the special candle holder covered with pure gold, and the other important objects in there also. I love to visualize the flickering candlelight making the colored images sparkle on the tent walls. It almost brings tears to my blind eyes to think that God loves His chosen nation of Israelites so much that He prepared a church for them to take everywhere they went."

In a warmer tone of voice, Tom said, "But even more thrilling is that God has provided a way for you and I to worship inside this church, whether it's made of canvas, mud and straw roof, or bricks or whatever. In my way of thinking, God's love blossomed beyond just His chosen Jewish people, to include the rest of the world He called Gentiles."

"During the times the Tabernacle was used, God had many rules and laws the people had to abide by. Yes His love was around, but not as easily seen. The people didn't know about real love – the kind of love that comes from God.

Because of that, God's own Son, Jesus Christ was born in a smelly barn where the humble shepherds, invited by an angel, first came to worship Him, with His mother Mary and Joseph."

Daenum listened as intently as the others did, inside their old tent with tablecloth patches. He certainly didn't think of Ol' Tom as an angel, but there was no doubt this blind dark-skinned Christian was sent by Heaven. Dae reached out

and took Tom's hand and urged him to return next Sunday and share more of what he sees in the love and goodness that comes only from God. The word TABERNACLE means 'to dwell with'. God wants to tabernacle with each of us, placing His glow of hope and truth within us for loving service to Him. [~]

#17 – Gates 'n Goats

How can you describe it? Maybe it's about as hard as describing a rainbow to Ol' Tom, and his blindness. As Tom sat in the little tent church, above his village, a couple ladies and about four teenagers sat on the ground in front of him. There wasn't any need in him asking everyone's permission to share descriptions of God's beauty with them. They all knew that Tom saw more of God with his heart than man's eyes ever could, and all were anticipating what beauty he'll describe next.

After a short but very humble prayer for guidance, he began. “Do you all remember last time we were talking about the beautiful tent church God named the TABERNACLE? Well, there's so much of God's beauty to describe it all, but for right now, let's talk about goats and roofs.”

All of Tom's listeners looked at each other wondering if he was having one of those moments that old people often have. He continued with, “Before you all think I'm looney let me explain about the roof of that portable church so precious to God. Well, God's nation had lots of sheep and goats. So God told Moses to have the workers make the roof and much of the curtains using goat's hair, even though the people didn't know why. This was another opportunity to trust God's directions, period.”

Tom continued with, “A long time ago, I heard a

anyone's imagination.

Watching the three men was a fourth man. He wore a triangular hat seen on most actors of pirates, as was the black patch over one eye. Held by one hand, at his side, is the map. It was the treasure map that showed them where to start digging and how deep in the Pacific island sand. In a straight line between the two biggest palm trees, fourteen paces from the tree nearest the gray boulder.

Treasure hunters come in all sizes and from many lands. As a teenager, Lenny walked with his young admirer, Toby, just 8 months past his 5th birthday. Though Toby had to have a helping hand from Lenny, the treasure hunting they were now doing in the very same town dump that Lenny had found the tent – a treasure to be sure.

“I'm only 5 and not good at most things, but here I am, a treasure hunter with my best friend,” Toby said to himself. Now anyone knows that to be a successful treasure hunter, you have to be able to recognize a treasure when you see it. No matter if that treasure used to be someone's trash; a treasure is a treasure – pure and simple.

Their first treasure that might have some possibilities was a card table that had one slightly bent leg. But moments later, Lenny picked up a collection of papers that had some interesting typed words on them and handwritten notes with portions underlined. All told, there were 5 pages.

About half of one of the pages appeared to be some Bible verses triple spaced with handwriting between the lines. Something inside the teen said he should talk to Ol' Tom the blind fella that lived in the ramshackled village below the tent mission. Tom just gushed with love for God's Word and its absolute beauty beyond what eyes can behold.

The next day, Lenny sat in the cool shade with Tom and read most of what the papers said. It was like Tom had embraced the greatest love of his life. No the papers were not

“Andy, that's certainly a good start. But more importantly, you need to confess the wrong that you did, to God. To confess just means you say the same thing about the sin that God does. Remember we talked before about sin is doing and thinking things that God doesn't like. But Andy, God wants even more for you to let Him care for you and protect you through every day. He wants you to invite Him to be your Lord; your loving Master. He wants you to believe His Son Jesus shed His innocent blood on the cross for a sacrifice to wash away all your sins, Andy. And for good, too. Isn't that great?”

“Andy, how about you and I both kneel right here on the ground and I'll help you to tell the Lord what we know He wants to hear. You talk to Him out loud, just like you've been talking to me, and I'll help you, if you want.”

The old blind man that once felt so useless and of no value to God or anybody else, lovingly led young Andy to accept the same free salvation that is offered to you and someone near you. [~]

#22 – The Treasure Map

The giant of a man with bulging muscles and a mean look that said he could bite the end off the flint-lock pistol he was holding. This giant was standing guard over a chest behind him. Two men a little smaller than him were using hammers and crowbars to break the heavy lock on the chest. For one full day both of these men struggled to open the chest, knowing that every hammer blow paid for the contents of the chest.

No human words could fully describe the chest contents of diamonds, rubies, perfect pearls, gold coins almost without number. The treasure chest was beyond

preacher that also raised goats describe goat hair. He said it's really light weight for the amount of year round insulation it gives. This preacher said it's almost like air conditioning. When the air is dry the goat hair roof is kind-of porous like a screen door. It lets in the cool air. But when the air is humid, like it's fixin' to rain, the goat hair swells up and becomes waterproof. I mean is that really smart of God, or what?”

The little church tent group looked up at their tent roof and it's tablecloth patches and got one those 'both-barrel-blessings' like Lenny's grandpa used to say. After a little discussion about that goat hair roof lesson, he began another lesson you could tell was very deep in his heart. Ol' Tom's calloused wrinkled hands rubbed his forehead like he was trying to shake the right words loose to show God's beauty of the 'Gate Goats'. His lesson began with some gentle hand motions. Tom said, “God designed a curtain fence all around the Tabernacle that used posts covered with pure gold. Can't you just see the sunlight glittering off those golden posts. I'm thinkin' each one was a reflection of the sun's power and beauty. Well, I wanna tell you about the gate, that was also made with white linen curtains that included blue, purple, and red colors.”

“Now before, we talked about the Gospels and how they presented Jesus Christ as a king, an ox servant, a perfect man, and an eagle flying in the blue sky. Well for me, I think of these when I learned the colors of the gate curtains. The purple is a color for kings, red is the sacrifice color probably of an ox, white would show the purity of a man, and the blue would be heaven's blue sky, the home of the all seeing eagle. 'Course that's just my thinking.”

“But most of all, my mind tries to see the depth of the gate goats. See, the tabernacle was a place of sacrifices of animals, lots of them. Some were for thanks to God, some were for sin offerings. Sin is God's name for things we do

and think, that we know God doesn't like. Well, the Tabernacle was the place where innocent animals were sacrificed – their blood was shed as a temporary payment for those sins.”

“So two goats would be brought to that gate of the Tabernacle. One goat was chosen to be the innocent blood sacrifice for the people's sins, and was called the 'SCAPEGOAT'. The other goat was taken out into the wilderness and set free.”

Tom took a couple deep breaths and rubbed his forehead some more. He continued, “Now just suppose you were that goat that was set free – totally free. Just pretend that you turned around and saw that other goat – the scapegoat being sacrificed. What would you think? Would you just say, 'Oh well...' and continue on?”

“Whether you have blinded eyes like me, or you can see and describe a sunset, the question is asked of everyone – even you and me. What is our response to the scapegoat? Jesus Christ, God's only Son was the truly innocent scapegoat – sacrifice for you and for me. We are set free from sin's terrible future, because of our heavenly Scapegoat. What do you have to say about that?” [~]

#18 – Prison Kids

It was hypnotic, in a good way. Laying on the ground, face up and watching the leaves wave at the cotton candy clouds. Daenum spent many precious moments watching the afternoon sun dance through the leaves like the twinkling stars of daytime. The teen thought about the many people in God's creation that can't enjoy these relaxing moments that seem to wash away fear, care, or stress. And it wasn't just that.

His gaze drifted to other trees with different shapes and

One disturbed teen mindset is loosely called, Preppy. Preppy teens over-dress with costly fashions normally worn by more adult business people. Emotionally they are fed up with the way the world is run, thinking they can do better. They seek leadership responsibilities in school and out, of projects and students.

Bullies are found in every sector of society and the planet, and that includes church also. Their actions and attitudes are pretty well known by all but the very sheltered from society. Bullies flourish in the digital on-line world of social networks.

The third and most grotesque group of disturbed youth are called 'Emos'. Abbreviated from emotionally disturbed. They often wear facial jewelry, black clothes and dark cosmetics. In most cases their sleeves are long to cover frequent cuts and scars. They often listen to music with suicide themes. I once shared my understanding of the emo with a neighborhood teen.

He said I had it wrong. He explained an emo teen is full of emotional pain that won't go away and no remedies seen to exist (to the teen). The teen cuts (self-mutilates) himself/herself with this 'distracting' pain of the cut. It's not the sight of their own blood, but the ability to control this pain – this cut. In some cases this cutting is in the form of the lasting pain of tattooing and piercing jewelry.

The Bible clearly states, “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:28)

... now back to the Vandalized part 2]<<

“Mr. Tom. I don't want to do mean things any more. And I don't want to feel afraid inside either. Yes I admit I pulled all the tent stakes out, and I'm willin' to admit to everyone that it was wrong. Is that all I need to do. Will that smooth everything out?”

neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27) Share this 'peace promise' with a teen near you.

(continued in next chapter)

#21 – *Vandalized! (part 2)*

His blind eyes couldn't reveal what was happening in front of him, but his sensitive ears and nose told Ol' Tom an animal or person was there. He waved his outstretched arms out in front of him and touched nothing. Sometimes you're faced with a situation you're not sure what to do next; yell, run (not easy when you're totally blind), or play possum and don't move a muscle.

But Tom elected to do none of those things and trust God's promise to protect and provide the vision needed – whether it's physical or spiritual. Many many times he walked to his favorite quiet spot away from the ramshackle village, without incident, by walking on the trail of small twigs to the quiet edge of the clearing.

He could barely hear the heavy breathing with an occasional whimper that had to be a person, likely a teen. He broke the silence with, “Who is before me? Answer now.” “Mr. Tom, it's me, Andy. I come askin' for your forgiveness. Please.” “Stand up Andy. You don't need to kneel to me for anything.” “I do mean stuff and I don't know why. Every time it makes me feel worse, and then I think about doing something even worser. That's about when I get these awful belly cramps that pain me big.”

[>>] Stepping out of the story for a moment to note a couple disturbing mindsets of teenagers today. These are experienced even by 'normal' appearing youth that may even attend a church like yours and mine.

leaves that proclaim their difference. Each tree, each leaf doing exactly what God designed them to do.

As he looked at God's design near ground level, he saw all the insects, small and large, busy as bees, doing what they do best. It was one of those 'thank-you Jesus' moments when you realize the grandeur of Heaven's creation, its coordination, and His unending control.

Now it's poetic and somewhat true to say that mankind is the pinnacle; the center; God's spotlight in all this creation, until you cast your eyes on the prison kids. The village children don't know about the prisons that have bars and rooms, often without windows. They don't know about the prisons that many Bible characters had to endure, mainly because they loved Jesus and made it known.

They didn't know about God-fearing sick people locked in a body that no longer allowed communication, hugs, or even able to do basic things without help. But they did know they were in prison as surely as the sun rises every morning (yes, as God designed.)

The children of the village at the bottom of the hill below the tent mission, knew they were in a prison more harsh than bars. Their prison from which they'd probably never be paroled was called poverty. Their prison shacks they called home often housed critters not spoke of in the finer homes of big cities. Their sheet-metal shacks didn't include any churches, schools, or fancy grocery stores with shelves packed with good food for growing bodies.

Some big city folks wouldn't even be able to comprehend a home without insulation, indoor plumbing, electricity, and even without running water. Dae wanted to break free. He wanted to break into some ways he and his fellow teens could reach through the walls of prejudice and plant seeds of God's good gifts deep in the hearts of the children – those prison kids.

Last Thursday was definitely one of those 'thank-you Jesus' days. Dae took his relaxing moments watching the never-in-a-hurry clouds when he spotted them. It was a real shocker – white leaves!

The teen rubbed his eyes twice to make sure he was seeing what he thought he was seeing. Sure enough – white leaves.

He jumped to his feet and took a close look at one of those spectacular white leaves. Well no doubt about it, it was a ragged piece of paper – kind of grimy on one side, but the other side, Dae would never forget in all his born days. The clean side of this particular white leaf showed the word, ME.

Inspecting another white leaf showed the word THIS. Each word obviously written by a small person. Scanning several nearby trees showed similar white leaves waving in the breeze, at the cotton candy clouds... and at Daenum.

The white leaf words declared over and over, JESUS LOVES ME THIS I KNOW FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO.

Dae remembered this was one of the Sunday afternoon Story Spot lessons that Lyla taught the eager children. Those very same children Dae's thoughts had just been locking in that poverty prison.

What does it say about the good news of God's unspeakable goodness? That goodness that blossoms God's beauty in every prison; from every person that begins by looking up and giving God the glory and praise He's due. And all amid those daylight dancing stars through leaves of every description – even white ones, that still carry a touch of the world's grime.

The Bible tells of a real person in the prison of a fish's belly. Yet we're still reading about him today. We learn about a small choir of fellows in prison, singing of God's goodness, at midnight. So amazed were others nearby, they trusted

A forked stick was stuck in the ground with another strong stick set in the fork with one end under a sizable rock away from the fire. The other end of the stick held Tom's bent-up teakettle already containing some water over the fire. Their elderly dark-skinned teacher said, “Watch closely. I'll be asking questions.” The fire soon had the teakettle shooting steam from its spout like it was trying to whistle for attention.

Tom asked the teens why the teakettle was doing what it was doing. He got good answers and attention from the teens. He set the teakettle away from the fire and let the fire die down. He faced the teens and began, “Ya know. Teens are a lot like this teakettle. I know I sure was, when I was your age. Pressure would build up in me until I thought I'd erupt like a volcano and tell the whole world how much I hurt inside.”

“Something ya gotta know about our inside pressure. When it comes out, it can burn – it can hurt others – it can even frighten people.” He paused for a moment and then continued. “Fear inside us is like those flames that create the pressure inside. If the fear continues, day after day, it'll soon erupt like steam or deadly lava and rocks blasting from a volcano.”

“God wants us to first think of these eruptions of outside anger, that started as inside hurt and fear Think of them as cries for help. He wants us to look past the rocky actions and hear the help cries that He hears. We are to become good listeners. With His help we can hear the heart rumblings long before an eruption and share God's love and promises to cool those steamy fears that seem to never leave.

Mentoring others with inside fears must be anchored, staked if you will, to God's infallible written word, in small clear bites. Jesus staked out His promise for our peace with, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled,

someone going to be injured next?

Most everyone involved with the hilltop mission above the 'poor-folks village' were very edgy, and some were angry, to say the least. Lyla walked up to the damage site with Ol' Tom's hand on her shoulder as she became his eyes for this uphill journey. She placed Tom's wrinkled hand on each place where the tent stake lay, next to the hole it once occupied.

Though Tom's blind eyes couldn't see the disturbed look in the eyes of everyone else, their eyes watched as he calmly examined the damage around the tent. His cool reaction to the vandalism led most to think he didn't care – which was as wrong as could be.

He stood to his feet, brushed the dirt from his knees and then rubbed his hands of dirt. Tom was not a man that wasted time with a bucket of 'what-if's. His announcement was clear and sure, “OK everybody. Tomorrow after noon we'll get the tent back together, and then have an old-fashioned no-frills bonfire. I need every teenager to attend. I'll bring the teakettle. For now, let's all go home and personally thank the Lord no one was injured.”

As each headed for home, the question on most of their minds was - what is going to happen tomorrow with Tom, the teenagers, and a teakettle?

Shortly after noontime the next day, teens began showing up. There was Lyla, Andy, Ian, Ben, Lenny, and Daenum all waiting for their blind guide, Tom to arrive. He did and led everyone in an opening prayer with a bit of an odd tone. Ol' Tom talked to the Lord like he thought the Lord knew this was going to happen and sort-of wanted it to happen for His good purpose.

The stakes and ropes were replaced and the mission tent was as before. Preparations were made for the small fire with rocks arranged as a fire ring in a place away from the tent, Story Spot, and nearby trees and brush.

God's love and forgiveness and praised Him, from then on.

Are you in prison; maybe of the world's gimmies, and 'I wants'? Where can you discover and post your white leaves? [~]

#19 – FEARED DEAD – No Clues!

Would be the newspaper headlines – that is, if the little village had a newspaper. As best as could be determined, every single person, young and old, was searching everywhere for Toby. The 5 yr old orphan boy had begun life with many more challenges than most. He could capture most anyone's empathy in a minute.

He became an orphan about a year ago. A birth defect caused chronic shoulder pain that restricted him from playing with the other village children and reduced his 'friend list' to almost a blank page. The teens had learned his intense desire to make Jesus his forever papa, and even donated his favorite sparkle stone to seal the deal. But now his struggle for lasting love hit absolute bottom.

How much does a little 5 yr old have to pay; how much does he have to sacrifice for a cup of love? And was he still alive? Could a wild animal have gotten him? Or maybe he didn't even want to be found. Only God knows.

The whole village searched as though he was a real part of each of their families. The mission teens were notified and they prayed like never before to find the little ragamuffin before it was too late. The afternoon sun marked the shortening of the daylight hours left, and still no sign of little Toby – dead or alive.

Lenny was searching along the shore of a small creek that stumbled along the rocks near the village. At quite a distance for a 5 yr old to walk, in the best of conditions, the

teenager saw something unusual in the middle of the creek. He began running not believing what he hoped to find. But there he was – the orphan Toby, more alone now that anyone could describe.

The closer Lenny got, the better he could see that it was Toby sitting in the middle of the creek of about ten inches of water.

As soon as Toby saw Lenny, he pointed at his shirt on the tree branch. Toby spoke loud to the teenager with, “Give my shirt to someone that needs it. I won't need it any more!”

As Lenny waded toward Toby, he could see the 5 yr old shivering greatly and his lips were already turning blue. The little orphan said, “Leave me alone. I'm waitin' for God to send a gush of water and wash me away to where He sends bad boys and liars!”

Lenny stumbled a little as he heard the rejection from the little fella that felt so alone and dirty inside. The teen exclaimed, “Well hold on now. This sounds like something I need to learn about. I want you to teach me about this right now. We'll go over to the bank and you teach me before the water gush comes.” The teen wanted every muscle in his body to rescue the little boy to safety and understand about the things God does.

Lenny left Toby's shirt alone and instead put his own shirt on Toby. The teen tried to give Toby a real 'daddy hug' and begging Heaven for the right words to warm a cold orphaned heart next to him. Lenny learned that Toby had lied to one of the grownups in the village and then lied again to try to cover it up. This 5 yr old was without a doubt, dead sure God wouldn't let no liars into heaven – even orphan ones. He'd lost his chance at getting a forever papa.

“Toby, can I tell you something about God's Love? I don't blame you at all for wanting a gush of God's water to wash you away. I really don't. But there's something you need

to know about God's flavor of love.” In the arms of the teenager, the little boy's shivering was diminishing and color was coming back into his lips.

“See, Toby, God's love is given to others – to you and me, not because we deserve it, but because of Who HE is. Think of it as a special gift so big it won't fit in any box, with or without a ribbon and pretty paper. We don't earn gifts by being good or that we've earned the love gift. God's gift is given to us because He loves us and will keep on loving us.”

“Toby. Have you seen a mama chicken and her fuzzy little chicks always pecking the ground for food? If danger comes, mama chicken opens her wings and her chicks hide under her wings. And she never asks them if they've been good enough to get under her wings. That's the way God is. He knows we sometimes do and think things that make Him sad. And He wants us to come to Him and tell Him we know we've done wrong - we've sinned. But either way, His wings of love are always open to us.”

Lenny put his ball cap on Toby's head as he carried him home, probably like the Good Samaritan did. A few days later the village people began asking Toby why the chicken feather in his cap. He said it reminded him that he was under His wings of love. [~]

#20 – *Vandalized! (part 1)*

There's no easy way to say it. The tent mission that took so much effort and prayer to build, is flattened. The stakes that anchored the tent ropes to the ground were all pulled out of the ground. The questions flew – who would do such a thing? Why on earth would anyone destroy efforts that are totally for helping others; others that can't easily help themselves? Will this destructive behavior continue? Is