

English

Year 10

Unit 4

Ethics, Faith and Values



13 year-old boy saves his family at sea

30th January 2026

News Report: Perth, Australia

Story summary

Austin Appelbee, a teenager in Western Australia, survived a terrifying four-hour swim after he and his family were swept out to sea near Quindalup.

With no way to return to shore, his mother made the painful decision to send Austin to find help as darkness approached.

Austin swam about four kilometres through strong waves, abandoning a damaged kayak and even removing his life jacket when it slowed him down. He later told the news media that prayer, Christian songs, and thoughts of his family kept him going.

“I don’t think it was me who did it — it was God the whole time,” he said. “I kept praying and praying, and I said to God, ‘I’ll get baptized, I’ll get baptized.’”

After collapsing on shore and calling for help, Austin learned hours later that his mother and siblings were rescued alive after drifting nearly 14 kilometres offshore.

How it began

The drama in the ocean off Western Australia’s south-west coast last Friday was in stark contrast to how the Appelbees’ morning had started.

The young family had finished packing their gear after holidaying at Club Wyndham resort, but decided on a final paddle before heading home to Gidgegannup, hiring a kayak and two paddle boards from the hotel.

They booked a two-hour session from 10am to 12pm and, after covering themselves in sun screen and putting on life jackets, they headed into the ocean at about 11am. While the water “seemed nice and calm to begin with,” conditions gradually deteriorated.

At first it was Austin who struggled against the strengthening current on a paddle board, and as Joanne tried to guide him back to the beach, her board flipped and she lost a paddle. 12-year-old brother Beau then tried to tow them both in with the kayak, but in the chaos the second paddle got lost and the kayak began taking on water. As the current dragged them further from shore, Austin traded with Beau and attempted to paddle them to safety, but was no match for the unrelenting conditions.

Lost in a wild ocean and drifting further out to sea, Joanne made an unfathomable life-or-death decision. As she clung to a blow-up paddleboard with her two terrified youngest children, she

yelled out to her oldest boy — 13-year-old Austin — who was battling the elements next to them on a plastic kayak. The four were powerless against the growing swell and, despite several hours of paddling, they continued being dragged further out to sea. She realised if the four of them were to survive, Austin was their only hope. Between 1.30pm and 2pm, Joanne made that heart-wrenching decision to see if Austin could make his way back to shore to save them all.

“One of the hardest decisions I’ve ever had to make was to say to Austin, ‘try and get to shore to get some help’, because it was getting serious really quickly,” she recalled.

And so Austin did what his mother asked. He turned for the coastline leaving his mum, Beau, and little sister, Grace, eight, clinging to plastic paddleboards as the howling offshore wind took them further out towards the horizon. But as he started paddling, his mother wondered if she’d ever see him again.

For the next four hours as she and her two youngest children struggled to survive the whipping winds and wild ocean, Joanne was tormented by whether she had made the right decision.

“As the sun went down I thought, ‘something’s gone terribly wrong here’, and my fear was that Austin didn’t make it . . . everything goes through your head,” she said.

Despite his determination, the wind and the waves were doing Austin no favours.

“I knew it would be a long way, but the kayak kept taking on water,” he said. “I was fighting rough seas, the kayak dumped me a million times, I thought I saw something in the water and I was really scared but I was just thinking I was going to make it.”

After about two hours, he decided to discard the kayak and shortly after, took the life jacket off too. Austin rotated between survival backstroke, breaststroke and freestyle for the next two hours, and did what he could to occupy his mind with happy thoughts.

“I was thinking about all my friends at school, and friends of my Christian Youth, and I just said, ‘not today,’” he said.

Eventually he made it to shore near Toby’s Inlet, two kilometres up the sand from where they set off. He said his legs “collapsed” once he touched solid ground, but he quickly sprung to action again, sprinting as best he could all the way back to the hotel where, at about 6pm, he used his mum’s phone to call triple-0.

“I said, ‘I need helicopters, I need planes, I need boats. My family’s out at sea’.

Out in the ocean Joanne had been trying to keep Beau and Grace entertained by singing and making jokes, but morale began to slip as night fell.

“As it got darker I thought, ‘there’s no one coming to save us,’” she recalled. “We were cold, we were shaking, and it was pretty terrifying for a while, then I lost my glasses, so I couldn’t see.”

Back on shore, as the rescue efforts got underway and time passed with no news, Austin began to fear the worst.

“I called Dad and was bawling, I finally realised that they were gone. I thought they were dead,” he said.

“I didn’t know where they were and how they were, and I thought they were dead. I had a lot of guilt in my heart because I thought I wasn’t fast enough.”

About five minutes later, he received a call saying his mum and siblings had been found.

“I thought it was fake. I didn’t believe it. I was really happy, but I couldn’t process it,” he said.

Joanne was equally ecstatic to learn Austin had made it to shore safely, having earlier been unsure if it was him or the hotel that alerted authorities.

“We were extremely proud,” Joanne said. “I’m speechless . . . to keep going for so long, he’s absolutely amazing,” she beamed.

The teenager had also earned high praise from his little brother.

“I’m proud of him. He normally struggles doing 350 metres, so about four kilometres is impressive, and I can’t be more proud of him as a younger brother,” Beau said.

Naturaliste Volunteer Marine Rescue commander Paul Bresland and skipper Dan Crosbie were part of the multi-agency rescue mission involving the Water Police Coordination Centre in North Fremantle, South West Police, local marine rescue groups and the RAC rescue helicopter.

At about 8.40pm, the helicopter spotted the family, which by then had drifted 7.9 nautical miles (approximately 14km) out to sea.

Mr Bresland was on a nearby Marine Rescue Busselton boat at the time and followed helicopter advice to locate the family.

“There was a tense wait when the chopper asked what the condition of the patients was, and when they said they were responsive . . . it was just ‘how good is this?’, he said.

But minutes before the rescue, the situation took a distressing turn when a big wave hit the family, separating them.

“I could only hear Grace screaming. I couldn’t hear Beau, and that scared me,” Joanne said.

“When the boat came and picked me up, I screamed that there were two kids in the water.

“I called out for Grace and I could hear her, and then all of a sudden, I heard this other voice (Beau). We picked them up and it was the best feeling in the world.”

The family received first aid onboard before being transferred to ambulances and later Busselton Health Campus for medical assessment.

In the aftermath, they spoke to Austin’s dad and remarked that he “must be a strong swimmer”.

“He said ‘they just finished VacSwim lessons and he failed’,” Mr Bresland said.

Aside from blistering, swelling and muscle pain, the family managed to avoid injuries.

Sore from the muscle pain, Austin attended school on Monday to share his incredible tale in a wheelchair. He has since swapped the wheelchair for support crutches and was ecstatic when his bravery scored him an invite to meet his favourite AFL team, the West Coast Eagles.

The family have extended their immense gratitude to the multi-agency rescue mission involving the Water Police Coordination Centre in North Fremantle, South West police, local marine rescue groups and the RAC Rescue helicopter.

Questions

1. Where did event take place?
2. Describe the water activity that the family was involved in.
3. How did Joanne feel about making the decision to send Austin for help?
4. Why did Austin abandon the kayak and the life jacket?
5. What kept Austin going?
6. How do we know that Austin was not usually a strong swimmer?
7. What unfortunate event happened minutes before the rescue?
8. Write a response to this true event. How does it make you feel? In what way does it strengthen or challenge your faith?

Writing: Persuasive writing or Argument

Counterarguments are opposing arguments that someone would make if they disagreed with you. When you write an opinion essay, it's important to include a counterargument and explain why it is not correct. This makes your argument stronger!

For each of the following arguments, draw up tables as follows and fill in the information. The first one has been started for you.

1. Dogs are unfriendly animals.

Argument	Evidence	Discredit the argument
Some people say that: Dogs are unfriendly animals.	They say this because: 1. They hear dogs barking at night. 2. 3.	However this isn't true because: 1. dogs bark as a way to communicate 2. 3.

2. Pets shouldn't be allowed in the classroom.

3. Cursive writing is important to learn.

4. Young people should not have mobile phones until they are 18.

5. Make up your own argument and counter argument. Make this into an essay of 150 words.

What is Truth?

Truth is the opposite to a lie. It is fact or reality. It is an unchanging principle

Society is heading away from truth. Opinion is now recognized more than truth. But ideas coming from traditional Biblical values, such as beliefs about family, life and death, can no longer be tolerated.

The constitution of many 'Western' countries was founded on moral principles found in Christianity and Judaism. We call these values Judeo-Christian values. An example would be the Ten Commandments. Both Jewish and Christian faiths uphold these moral principles. Examples of governments upholding Judeo-Christian values in its foundation would be America, England and Australia. However, adherence to these values is breaking down in Western nations.

What is the basis for Judeo-Christian values?

A belief in the God of the Bible, and that His book is our guide to Truth, for example:

- It is wrong to take another's life
- Traditional view of marriage – (It is ideal for children to have both a father and a mother.)
- Fair treatment of all individuals - (Love your neighbour as yourself)
- Freedom of religion - (God Himself has given us freedom to choose)

The post-truth era

A Modern Philosopher has said, 'There is no truth. We should give up the search for truth because it all depends on how you see it.'

What did Jesus say?

"I am the way, the TRUTH and the life"

"You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free"

How do we know that Jesus is the Truth?

- The Bible tells us that Jesus and the Father together created the universe, (Gen 1:26)
- We can see from the order of creation that there must have been a Creator (Rom 1:20)
- Historical records (apart from the Bible) give evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, e.g., the empty tomb.
- We have an inner conscience that tells us right from wrong, (Rom 2:15)
- People who have accepted Jesus as the truth testify of personal experience.

What happens when people believe that truth is a matter of opinion?

People try to pass lies as facts. Then other people start to believe their lies. Lying is no longer called lying.

"The further a society drifts from Truth, the more it will hate those who speak it." - George Orwell

Truth is the new hate speech

People don't know what they believe. In modern society, people are too scared to challenge lies because they themselves do not know what to believe, or they are afraid to offend people with the truth.

How should Christians act in a post-truth era?

We must set an example in the way we act and speak. We must know what is true and false; find out what is true before sharing it, e.g., on social media; we can ask God to show us what is true. We must stand up and fight for the truth.

Eph 6:12 For **our** struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Don't sit back and leave it to God. Fight with Him and speak out for Him.

Speak truth in love

If we speak the truth without love we can come across as angry, bigoted, judgmental, harsh and unforgiving. However, if we just show love without speaking the truth, we are not standing for truth and not helping others to know the truth.

The West is now opposed to a belief in the true God. How did this happen?

After World War 2, many Western nations introduced laws aimed at eliminating hatred and violence against Jews. Then nations passed laws to include other groups facing discrimination based on gender, colour and race.

More recently, more and more minority groups have convinced governments to pass more and more legislation banning discrimination against people on the grounds of race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth, trade and sexual orientation.

Isn't this a good thing? At first glance, YES! It sounds OK, but it's the AGENDA we have to beware of. Laws passed to protect 'human rights' can be a way of deliberately restricting freedom of religion and expression.

Problem: What one person sees as hateful may not be seen by another person as hateful.

Many see our traditional values as hateful. Expressing Biblical values has become known as hate speech.

Anti-discrimination law is intended to protect the right of all people to be treated equally. This is a good thing, BUT what happens when some members of the community do not like the beliefs of another group? What one group sees as being right, the other group sees as being wrong. One group may lobby the government to pass laws to keep the other quiet – to stop them from expressing what they believe.

Although everyone is crying out for tolerance, the view of some of us will not be tolerated. Our Social Media posts and You Tube clips will get taken down. In our 'inclusive' society, anyone feeling, thinking or speaking in a non-inclusive way will be excluded.

Examples of hate-speech

Value: respect for human life

Person opposing this value: a mother of an unborn child, (even at 9 months gestation), who wants her baby destroyed.

Hate speech against this person would be any attempt to speak up for the right of the child.

Value: traditional view of marriage and family

Person opposing this value: One who believes in the changing of the birth gender with sex hormones; or who believes in same-sex marriage and in adoption of children by homosexuals.

Hate speech against this person would be expressing the opinion that children should be raised in a traditional family.

Gender education in schools

Anti-bullying programs in schools exist only for the protection of children who want to change their gender. Children are told that they have the right to change their gender if they feel like it. There is no respect for parents who do not want their children to participate. There is also no addressing of bullying of children who might be called fat, thin, stupid or any other names.

Hate speech becomes hate crime

In the West now there are laws against hate speech and against “offense”. These laws are put in place by those who want to restrict religious freedom.

Is it wrong to offend anyone?

Freedom of speech should include the freedom to offend.

Things we shouldn't hate

- God and Jesus
- Truth
- Righteous living
- Other people

Things we should hate

- Violence and murder
- Stealing, greed and dishonesty in business
- Lying and deceit
- Pride
- Idolatry
- False teaching and false religions
- Sexual immorality
- All sin

Consequences of laws against hate speech

Laws against "hate speech" mean that those who break the law are guilty of "hate crime." People who commit "hate crime" can be thrown in jail or fined. This is not imagination. It's already happening in Western nations.

Who is most valued in our modern society?

In an anti-God society, those with anti-God beliefs will be most valued. People who believe in God and His values will not be tolerated. Their differing opinions will be called "hate speech".

Everyone should be allowed to express their beliefs freely, no matter how much we disagree with a person's beliefs, ideologies and practice.

Let's stand up for Truth. Let's speak the truth in love, even when things are difficult to say.

Reference: The Death of Western Christianity, Patrick Sookhdeo

Activities

1. If you were in charge of drawing up a constitution for a new country, which values would you choose? Make a list of 5.
2. Explain the meaning of Judeo-Christian values.
3. How can we know what is true and what is false?
4. Give three examples in our post-Christian society, of values that are not founded on truth.
5. What is hate speech? Give an example.
6. What is hate crime? Give an Example.
7. What is wrong with the statement; "This is MY truth."
8. How would you respond to a person who tells you that the earth is flat?
9. What is the meaning of tolerance?
10. Give an example of lack of tolerance in our society.

Sophie Scholl and the White Rose

Margie Burns

At the age of 21, Sophie Scholl was executed by the People's Court in Germany on Feb. 22, 1943, during the Holocaust, for her involvement in The White Rose, an organization that was secretly writing pamphlets calling for the end of the war and strongly denouncing the inhuman acts of the Nazis.

In May, 1942 German troops were on the battlefields of Russia and North Africa, while students at the University of Munich attended a friendship group sharing their love of medicine, Theology, and philosophy and their aversion to the Nazi regime. Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Sophie Scholl were at the center of this group of friends they called "The White Rose".

Attending the same university were two medical students, Willi Graf and Jurgen Wittgenstein, who had served in a military hospital in 1939, with Hans, Sophie's older brother. Along with Christoph Probst, a married soldier and father of three, they eventually joined The White Rose.

Sophie Scholl was born on May 9, 1921, in Forchtenberg, Germany, where her father Robert Scholl, was mayor. At 12 Sophie joined the Hitler Youth, but became disillusioned. The arrest of her father for referring to Hitler as "God's enemy," to an employee, left a strong impression on her.

To the Scholl family loyalty meant obeying the dictates of the heart." What I want for you is to live in uprightness and freedom, no matter how difficult that proves to be," her father told the family.

When the mass deportation of Jews began in 1942, Sophie, Hans, Alexander and Jurgen realized it was time for action. They bought a typewriter and a duplicating machine and Hans and Alex wrote the first leaflet with the heading: Leaflets of The White Rose, which said:

" There is nothing is so unworthy of a nation then allowing itself to be governed without opposition by an evil regime. Western civilization must defend itself against extreme authoritarian oppression and offer passive resistance, before the nation's last young man has given his blood on some battlefield."

Members of The White Rose worked day and night in secrecy, producing thousands of leaflets, mailed from undetectable locations in Germany, to scholars and medics. Sophie bought stamps and paper at different places, to divert attention from their activities.

In 1933 Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany. Many Germans who were uncomfortable with the anti-Semitic actions of the Nazi party, appreciated Hitler's ability to promote pride in the nation.

The second White Rose leaflet stated: "Since the conquest of Poland 300,000 Jews have been murdered, a crime against human dignity. Germans, we must fight against these terrible deeds."

Sophie's brother Hans spent two years in the military, studied medicine at the University of Munich, and was a medic at the Eastern front with Alex, Willi and Jurgen in 1942.

Jurgen transported stacks of pamphlets to Berlin. The journey was dangerous, "Trains were crawling with military police. If you were a civilian and couldn't prove you'd been deferred, you were taken away immediately," he recalled.

Germany was ruled by an absolute dictatorship. The party controlled the news media, police, armed forces, judiciary system, communications, education, cultural and religious institutions.

The third leaflet read: "We must sabotage in armament plants, newspapers, public ceremonies, and convince the lower classes of the senselessness of continuing the war."

The Nazi laws of 1935 had demanded expulsion of anyone who was not Aryan, (from a Caucasian ancestry), declaring Jews as non-citizens. The international press had begun to report beatings of Jews in the streets, so Hitler moved the Jews out of the sight of the general population, at first to "ghettos" and then to concentration camps.

On November 9, 1938, 30,000 Jews were beaten and arrested, and Storm Troops burned 191 synagogues on Kristallnacht, "the night for the broken windows," causing 200,000 Jews to flee to the countryside.

When Alexander Schmorell was asked to swear an oath to Hitler, he asked to be discharged from the army. Willi Graf turned to passive resistance like the rest, after serving as a medical orderly in Yugoslavia. He was assigned to the Second Student's Company in Munich, where he met Sophie, Hans, Alexander, Christoph, and Jurgen.

Their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber, was shocked when he learned of the state-organized atrocities against the Jews committed in Germany, and he worked on the final White Rose leaflets.

Each leaflet was more critical of Hitler and the German people who supported him. The fifth mentioned: "Hitler is leading the German people into the abyss. Blindly they follow their seducers into ruin...Are we to be forever a nation which is hated and rejected by all mankind?"

The Gestapo (Hitler's police), had been looking for the pamphlets' authors as soon as the first ones appeared. As the language in the leaflets became more inflammatory, they stepped up their efforts. They arrested people at the slightest hint of suspicion.

Sophie and Hans brought a suitcase of the final leaflets, written by Professor Huber, to the University, and left them in corridors for the students to discover and read.

Jakob Schmidt, University handyman and Nazi party member, saw Hans and Sophie with the leaflets and reported them. They were taken into Gestapo custody. Sophie's 'interrogation' was so cruel, she appeared in court with a broken leg.

On Feb 22, 1943, Sophie, Hans and Christoph were condemned to death by the 'People's' Court, which had been created by Hitler's party to eliminate his enemies.

Hans Scholl's last words shouted from the guillotine were, " Long live freedom!" In an unprecedented action by the guards, Christoph Probst was allowed a few moments alone with Hans and Sophie before they went to their deaths. After months of Gestapo interrogations to obtain the names of his co-conspirators, Willi was executed. His final thoughts were: " They shall continue what we have begun."

" How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause," Sophie said. " Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go," she continued, " but what does my death matter, if through us thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?"

The White Rose is a radiant page in the annals of the 20th Century. The courage to swim against the stream of public opinion, even when doing so was equated with treason, and the conviction that death is not too great a price to pay for following the whisperings of the conscience," writes Chris Zimmerman in *The White Rose: Its Legacy and Challenge*.

Two hundred German schools are named for the Scholls, and politicians such as former New York Mayor David Dinkins invoke their names, and visit their graves. With the rise of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and violence against foreigners in Germany, the anniversary of the executions is a powerful reminder.

Sophie Scholls sister Inge Aicher-Scholl wrote: " Perhaps genuine heroism lies in deciding to stubbornly defend the everyday things, the mundane and the immediate."

The final leaflet, though undelivered by the White Rose, found its way to the resistance, and was carried to Sweden. From there it was placed into the hands of the British, who made thousands and thousands of copies. As their bombers flew over Germany, the letters were dropped all over the country. The truth could not be hidden.

Activities

1. Write the meaning of the underlined words
2. What did Sophie think about Hitler at the age of 12? What influenced her to change her mind?
3. What was her father's advice to the family?
4. What was "the White Rose"?
5. What was the essential message of the leaflets they produced and distributed?
6. Not all Germans thought badly of Hitler. Why?

7. What was behind the movement to expel “non-Aryans”? Where did the go?
8. Why do you think one of the leaflets asked the German people, “Are we to be forever a nation which is hated and rejected by all mankind?”
9. What was Sophie’s final message to all people?
10. How willing are we to stand up for truth, even if it means sacrifice? What are some of the issues in today’s society that require Christians to stand up for the truth?

The sinking of the Empress of Ireland

The sinking of the British liner, *the Empress of Ireland*, was one of the worst ship disasters in history.

The ship, carrying 1,477 passengers and crew left Canada bound for Liverpool, England. As it travelled down the St. Lawrence River on its way to the ocean, a heavy fog descended. At 1.30 pm, on the morning of May 29, 1914, The Empress of Ireland collided with the Norwegian freighter Storstad in the gulf of Canada’s St. Lawrence River. The Storstad penetrated 15 feet into the Empress of Ireland ‘s starboard side, and the vessel sunk within 14 minutes, drowning 1,012 of its passengers and crew.

The tragedy came two years after the Titanic sank after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic, leaving more than 1,500 people dead. The Titanic disaster brought about public pressure to increase safety standards on ships, so crews were trained in emergency procedures and more than enough lifejackets and lifeboats were supplied.

On collision, the water rushed into the boat. From such stories as could be gathered from survivors and from members of the crew, it appears that Captain Kendall and his officers did all that was humanly possible in the fourteen minutes that the Empress hung on the river.

Many people went down with the ship, but some managed to jump into the river, clinging to bits of wreckage and praying for help.

Some passengers managed to get into the life-boats. 120 of these were young Christian people from the Salvation Army, who had been on mission in Canada and were returning to England.

Each one of them put on a life vest stored in the life-boat. But seeing the desperate people around them struggling in the freezing water, they gave up their own safety of the life-boats as they pulled people in. They gave up their places to others and jumped into the cold water, wearing life jackets. But as they saw the people around them with no life jackets, one by one, the Salvation Army youths took off their life jackets and threw them to the people around them.

One middle-aged gentleman was thrown a life jacket by a young girl of 18. “No,” he shouted, “You must have it.” After all, this girl had her whole life ahead of her. Why should she die instead of him?

“No,” replied the girl, throwing the life jacket back. “You must have it. I will die better than you.”

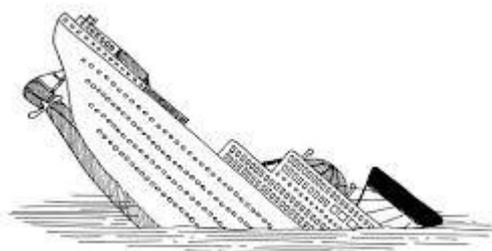
The young people chose to do this because they all knew where they were going. Around them were people who probably did not know Jesus. The young people were giving the other people a second chance to die, hopefully one day, to die knowing with Jesus rather than without Him.

The Crewmembers of The Storstad (which collided with the Empress of Ireland and left with only a broken bow) picked up survivors along with two other rescue ships. But none of the 120 Salvation Army youth survived.

Just two years before this event, the founder and leader of the Salvation Army, William Booth, had gone to be with the Lord. Before he died, he was scheduled to travel and deliver a sermon. However, due to illness he could not go. Instead, he sent a telegram of his sermon. The sermon consisted of just one word, “others”.

Activities

1. What caused the sinking of the Empress of Ireland?
2. What valuable lessons had been learned from the sinking of the Titanic?
3. How do we know that the captain was praiseworthy?
4. What was the reason that the Salvation Army youth gave up their life jackets?
5. Who was William Booth?
6. What did he mean by his final message, “others”.



Language Usage

Write a dialogue.

Write a conversation between two characters of your choice, e.g. between a policeman and a thief.

When writing dialogue, remember:

1. Use quotation marks before and after the speaker's words.
2. Use a comma to separate what the speaker said from the rest of the sentence.
3. Start a new paragraph when switching speakers.

Punctuation practice

Rewrite the following sentences with correct punctuation. Remember the convention of adding speech marks.

where is my dog asked james

we are having a party on saturday said mrs jolly I hope you can make it

first explained my grandpa we will need to clean up the garage

if you go to the shop please buy me some oranges and apples said natalie

oh no! my pen spilled ink all over my dress cried rebeka

I cant believe said mum that you didn't remember my birthday

my brother just threw all of my homework into the sink said katie

Paraphrasing

Read the paragraph. Then, in your own words, share three interesting facts about the ostrich. Write in your own words. Do not copy the text directly. Say it another way.

The ostrich is the world's tallest and heaviest living bird. It can grow to 2.7 metre tall. It was once known as the "camel bird" because its eyes, long neck, eyelashes and even the way it walks bear a strong resemblance to the camel. Similarly to camels, the ostrich can live in high temperatures and go without water for long periods of time. Though these birds cannot fly, they are built to run! Ostriches can run at steady speeds of 50 kilometres per hour and quick bursts of 70 kilometres per hour. They use their wings to stay balanced as they run. If it can't run away from danger, it drops to the ground and remains still. Its colour helps it camouflage with the soil!

Army of Angels

http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/stories/eb_angels.htm

Author unknown

A missionary on furlough told the following true story while visiting his home church in Michigan, USA:

"While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine, and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital.

Upon arrival in the city, I observed two men fighting, one of whom had been seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same time talked to him about the Lord. I then traveled two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident...

Two weeks later I repeated my journey. Upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me that he had known I carried money and medicines. He said, "Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and the drugs. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw that 26 armed guards surrounded you." At this, I laughed and said that I was certainly all alone in that jungle campsite.

The young man pressed the point, however, and said, "No, sir, I was not the only person to see the guards, my friends also saw them and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone."

At this point in the sermon, one of the men in the congregation jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked if he could tell him the exact day this happened. The missionary told the congregation the date, and the man who interrupted told him this story.

"On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was preparing to go play golf. I was about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Lord was so strong; I called some men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. (Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?)"

The men who had met together to pray that day stood up. The missionary wasn't concerned with who they were; he was too busy counting how many men he saw. There were 26 men.

This story is an incredible example of how the Spirit of the Lord moves in mysterious ways. If you ever hear such prodding, go along with it. As the above true story clearly

illustrates, "with God all things are possible." More importantly, God hears and answers the prayers of the faithful! God works in mysterious ways!

Activities

1. How did the missionary help the young man who had been injured in a fight?
2. What did the young man and his friends plan on doing to the missionary?
3. What saved the missionary from the plans of the young men?
4. What is the connection between the army of angels and the prayer meeting that was help for the missionary?

The timely hot water bottle

"The Lord directs the steps of the Godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand." (Psalm 37:23-24 NLT).

'Before they call, I will answer.' (Isaiah 65:24)

This is a story written by a doctor who worked in Africa.

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive; as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator).

We also had no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in.

Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates).

'And it is our last hot water bottle!' she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles.

They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

'All right,' I said, 'put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts Your job is to keep the baby warm.'

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, one ten -year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. 'Please, God' she prayed, 'Send us a hot water bottle today It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon.'

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, 'And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?'

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say 'Amen?' I just did not believe that God could do this.

Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home.

Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the verandah was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly-colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend.

Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt something.....could it really be?
I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could.

Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, 'If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!'

Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully-dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted!

Looking up at me, she asked, 'Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?'

'Of course,' I replied!

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator.

And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child - five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it 'that afternoon.'

'Before they call, I will answer.' (Isaiah 65:24)

Activities

1. What is a hot water bottle? Describe and draw one.
2. How did the mother of the premature baby die?
3. What did the medical staff do to care for the baby?
4. The doctor gasped at the audacity of Ruth's prayer. What does this mean?
5. What does this true story show us about the faith of children?
6. Write out these Bible verse that tells us to have the faith of little children: Luke 18:17 and Matthew 18:4
7. Make a comment on the timing of God's provision in this case.

Abortion

Cultures can be judged in many ways, but eventually every nation in every age must be judged by this test: *how did it treat people?*

The Hippocratic Oath, which goes back more than 2000 years, has traditionally been taken by graduate students of medical schools in the West. It includes: "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception." In the 1970s, the phrase, "from the time of conception" was deleted and replaced with "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life".

The Bible teaches that 'man is made in the image of God' and therefore unique. Remove that teaching, and there is no adequate basis for treating people well.

Of all the subjects relating to the erosion of human life, abortion is the keystone. Rightly, the matter of racial discrimination is widely contested. There have been massive protests against the treating of black people as non-persons, in the history of America, Australia and other countries. But the law declares millions of unborn babies of every colour of skin, to be non-persons.

It is not logical that a parent may be apprehended for child abuse if they cause harm to their child after birth, and yet those who kill their child before birth are without penalty, and in fact have society's approval.

As further evidence that our society is schizophrenic, consider our concern to provide special facilities for the disabled in public places: wheelchairs, ramps, conveyances to get the disabled on to buses and trains. Yet while having proven that we have compassion for the disabled, as well as providing resources to care for them, at the same time our laws give permission to destroy the newborn baby who might have become one of those disabled individuals.

Another serious example is that we will transport a new-born baby who is born premature, and has a congenital defect incompatible with life, to a hospital, so that a sophisticated team of doctors and nurses can correct that defect and plan for the baby's rehabilitation. Meanwhile, in other hospitals other medical personnel are destroying perfectly normal infants in the womb.

That children are often born alive after abortions is fact. Often, no medical care or pain relief is provided for these children. We need to think seriously about the aborted human beings who have been deprived of a chance to live, but we also need to consider with sympathy and compassion the bereft mothers. To tell a pregnant woman that in a few hours or a day in the hospital or clinic will rid her of all her problems and will send her out the door a free person, is to forget the humanness of women who are now mothers, even though their child has gone. Abortion does not end all the problems. Often it just exchanged one set of problems for another.

Reference: Whatever happened to the human race? Francis Schaeffer

Activities

1. Expand on the meaning of the first sentence. What does this mean to you?
2. Hippocrates was an ancient Greek physician, often referred to as the "Father of Medicine," who lived around 460 to 370 BCE. He is known for establishing medicine as a profession distinct from other fields and for his contributions to medical ethics, including the Hippocratic Oath. What is the meaning of the Hippocratic Oath taken by medical doctors today?
3. What is the Biblical basis for treating people well?
4. What is the meaning of the opening statement of paragraph 6: As further evidence that our society is schizophrenic ...
5. Make a list of all the inconsistencies when it comes to caring for human life after they are born, but not caring at all for the unborn.
6. Explain in your own words the meaning of the last two sentences.



It Is Well with My Soul - The Story Behind the Hymn

Horatio Gates Spafford was born in New York, on 20th October 1828, but it was in Chicago that he became well-known for his clear Christian testimony. He, and his wife Anna were active in their church, and their home was always open to visitors. They counted the world-famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, among their friends. They were blest with five children, and considerable wealth. Horatio was a lawyer, and owned a great deal of property in his home city.

Not unlike Job in the Old Testament of the Bible, tragedy came in great measure to this happy home. When four years old, their son, Horatio Jnr, died suddenly of scarlet fever. Then only a year later, in October 1871, a massive fire swept through downtown Chicago, devastating the city, including many properties owned by Horatio. That day, almost 300 people lost their lives, and around 100,000 were made homeless. Despite their own substantial financial loss, the Spaffords sought to demonstrate the love of Christ, by assisting those who were grief-stricken and in great need.

Two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in England, knowing that his friend, the evangelist D. L. Moody, would be preaching there in the autumn. Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four remaining children, all daughters, 11-year-old Anna, 9-year-old Margaret Lee, 5-year-old Elizabeth, and 2-year-old Tanetta.

On 22nd November 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the steamship, Ville du Havre, their vessel was struck by an iron sailing ship. Two hundred and twenty-six people lost their lives, as the Ville du Havre sank within only twelve minutes.

All four of Horatio Spafford's daughters perished, but remarkably Anna Spafford survived the tragedy. Those rescued, including Anna, who was found unconscious, floating on a plank of wood, subsequently arrived in Cardiff, South Wales. Upon arrival there, Anna immediately sent a telegram to her husband, which included the words "Saved alone...."

Receiving Anna's message, he set off at once to be reunited with his wife. One particular day, during the voyage, the captain summoned him to the bridge of the vessel. Pointing to his charts, he explained that they were then passing over the very spot where the Ville du Havre had sunk, and where his daughters had died. It is said that Spafford returned to his cabin and wrote the hymn "It is well with my soul" there and then, the first line of which is, "When peace like a river, attendeth my way.." Obviously, the voyage was one of deep pathos, and is the clear inspiration of the moving and well-loved hymn. Horatio's faith in God never faltered. He later wrote to Anna's half-sister, "On Thursday last, we passed over the spot where she went down, in mid-ocean, the waters three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe..... dear lambs".

After Anna was rescued, Pastor Nathaniel Weiss, one of the ministers travelling with the surviving group, remembered hearing Anna say, “God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why.”

Naturally Anna was utterly devastated, but she testified that in her grief and despair, she had been conscious of a soft voice speaking to her, “You were saved for a purpose!” She remembered something a friend had once said, “It’s easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God.”

Following this deep tragedy, Anna gave birth to three more children, but she and Horatio were not spared even more sadness, as on February 11th, 1880, their only son, Horatio (named after the brother who had died, and also after his father), he also died at the age of four.

In August 1881 the Spaffords left America with a number of other like-minded Christians, and settled in Jerusalem. There they served the needy, helped the poor, and cared for the sick, and took in homeless children. Their desire was to show those living about them, the love of Jesus.

The original manuscript of the Spafford’s hymn has only four verses, but later another verse was added. The music, which was written by Philip Bliss, was named after the ship on which Horatio and Anna’s daughters had died – Ville du Havre.

Horatio Spafford died of malaria on 16th October 1888. Anna Spafford continued to work in the surrounding areas of Jerusalem until her own death in 1923. Both Horatio and Anna were laid to rest in Jerusalem. It can truly be said, in the words that Spafford penned that, “It is well with their souls.”

<https://www.cocdiscipleship.org/middle-ages/horatio-gates-spafford-the-story-behind-the-hymn-it-is-well-with-my-soul/>

Activities

1. Why was the family travelling from New York to England?
2. Why did they not all travel together?
3. When Horatio passed the spot where his daughters had perished, he said, “But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe..... dear lambs”. What did he mean by this?
4. The words of the chorus of the hymn are: “It is well with my soul”. How do you think Horatio could say this?
5. Anna was told that she had been saved for a purpose. What work for the Lord did she go on to do

Halloween

“I’m glad that Christian parents let their children worship the devil at least one night out of the year.” (Anton LaVey, Founder of the Church of Satan)

Gina Marisa, author of this article, is Christian who was once involved in Satanism. The Holy Spirit drew her gloriously to Jesus and she became His beloved daughter.

This is Gina’s testimony.

“When I was still a Satanist, Halloween was a special day for me. It was my “favourite day.”



In the USA, and now in many other countries, Halloween is celebrated at the end of October, a night when children dress up as witches or ghosts, and visit houses asking for sweets. Many believe that Halloween is nothing more than a harmless festival that allows kids to collect candy. But is it? Its origins lie deeply rooted in the Occult, and Christians should stay away. Here are the reasons why ...

1. October 31st has long been known as “The Festival of the Dead.” The Celtic tribes and their priests the Druids celebrated this day, as a marker for the change from life to death.
2. Halloween today is still performed by adherents of Witchcraft who use the night for their rituals. Some types of Witches celebrate Halloween as the “Feast of Samhain,” the first feast of the Witchcraft year. Being a ‘festival of the dead’, Halloween is a time when witches attempt to communicate with ‘the dead’ through various forms of divination.
3. Christians should not be involved with occultic practice or divination. Note God’s command against divination in Deuteronomy 18.
4. Occultists believe Halloween is a time of transition between life and death. Some occult practitioners practiced divination and believed you could learn the secrets of life and wisdom by lying on a grave and listening to the ‘messages’ from the ‘long-departed’.
5. Occultists also taught that ‘spirits’ and ‘ghosts’ left the grave during this night and would seek out warmth in their previous homes. Villagers, fearful of the possibility of being visited by the ghosts of past occupants, would dress up in costumes to scare the spirits on their way. They would also leave food and other treats at their door to appease the spirits so they would not destroy their homes, or crops, but instead move on down the road. That is the real reason why kids dress up in costumes today and go door-to-door seeking treats.
6. Occultists also would try to scare away the spirits by carving a scary face into a pumpkin. This horrible visage would hopefully move the spirit on to another home or village and spare that home from destruction. Sometimes the villagers would light a candle and place it within

the pumpkin and use it as a lantern (hence the name, Jack-o-Lantern). This is the origin of carving pumpkins at Halloween.

7. In some Witchcraft covens, the closing ritual includes eating an apple or engaging in fertility rites. In the Bible (Genesis 3), eating a piece of fruit brought sin and death into the world. In witchcraft, eating an apple is symbolic of bringing life. The practice of bobbing for apples brings together two pagan traditions: divination and the fertility ritual.

8. Participating in Halloween activities, (dressing up as witches and ghosts etc.) 'just for fun', gives sanction to an opportunity that promotes Witches, divination, haunted houses, and other occult practices.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Activities

1. Find out, and write the meaning of the word "Celtic". This could give us a clue as to where Halloween originated. What country could that be?

2. Who were the Druids?

3. Halloween today is still performed by adherents of Witchcraft. What does the word 'adherents' mean in the context of the text?

4. Halloween is a time when witches attempt to communicate with 'the dead' through various forms of divination. What is the meaning of 'divination'?

5. What does the Bible say about divination? Read Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and 1 Chronicles 10:13-14.

6. What is the significance of the Halloween pumpkin, made into a scary face?

7. In the light of 2 Corinthians 6:14, and 1 Peter 2:9, what would be wrong with a Christian participating in Halloween activities?

An eye for a life

Some years ago, in a park in the city of Nagasaki, Japan, a young white woman began to speak with the people passing by about the good news of Jesus and His love for them. She had not been long in Japan, but she had worked hard at the language school and knew enough Japanese to be able to share the Christian message simply.

As she was speaking, she was suddenly aware of a blinding pain in her eye. A young man had maliciously hurled a large stone at her from his hiding place in some nearby bushes.

The missionary was given medical attention and the police were informed of the incident. "We'll find that young hooligan and punish him, Miss Imhoff," they promised. "Your eye is badly damaged. He deserves punishment." The police judged from the injury that the woman would never see again with that eye.

"Please don't punish him," pleaded Miss Imhoff. "I forgive him, and Jesus died for his sins as well as mine and yours. Please let him go free."

The police officers were amazed at this woman who had such a loving and forgiving attitude, even to someone who had done her serious injury. Miss Imhoff's eye never recovered from the incident, but this did not deter her from continuing in Nagasaki as a Christian missionary.

Years passed. One day, there sailed into Nagasaki harbour a large Japanese man of war. The local Christians arranged a reception for the officers and men of the crew.

The ship's captain stood to reply to the speech of welcome before the banquet began, and surprised everyone with this story.

"I grew up in the city of Nagasaki," he began, "so I am very pleased to return to this place. I am a Christian now, but my youth I was very rebellious and lived a wild life in the city. One day I threw a big stone at a missionary lady who was speaking about Jesus to people in the park. I'm ashamed to say that the stone damaged the lady's eye. I was so scared that I ran and hid in the mountains. I was afraid the police would find me and punish me. But a friend found me and brought me amazing news that the missionary had forgiven me and didn't want them to punish me. I couldn't believe that anyone could be so kind as to forgive someone who had injured me, but my friend assured me it was true.

"I couldn't get this out of my mind. What was this Christianity; that it would make a person act in such a loving, forgiving manner? I began to search out all the books I could find about it. I read the bible. The more I read, the more I knew this was the way of life I wanted to live. I visited Christian church and after talking with the pastor, I became a Christian. That was many years ago now. But I am so grateful that the missionary lady forgave me, and that Jesus has forgiven me all my sins. I have often wished I could meet her and tell her what Jesus has done in my life."

A middle-age lady in the gathering was seen to quietly weep, but the tears were tears of joy, not grief. Miss Imhoff was present at the reception and heard the captain's testimony and was able to rejoice with him that God answered the prayers she had prayed for him years before.

Adapted from "Safety Last" by Rita Snowden, Epworth Press

1. Express in your own words the meaning of the title of this story.
2. . A young man had maliciously hurled a large stone at her. What is the meaning of maliciously?
3. One day, there sailed into Nagasaki harbour a large Japanese man 'o war. What is a man o' war?
4. Find words in the story that have these meanings:
 - Prevent
 - with wicked intentions
 - begged
 - declare the truth of
5. Find out about Nagasaki. Write a short paragraph about the city and its people. What important event occurred there in 1945?

Epworth Press, 25-35 City Road, London, E.C.1

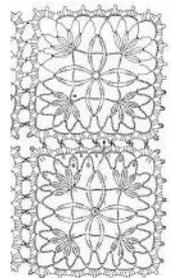
The Tablecloth

This story makes you understand things happen for a reason

The pastor and his wife had been newly assigned to their first ministry, to reopen a church in suburban Brooklyn, U.S.A. They arrived in early October, 1982, excited about their opportunities. When they saw their church, it was very run down and needed much work. They set a goal to have everything done in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve.

They worked hard, repairing pews, plastering and painting walls, and on December 18th were ahead of schedule and just about finished. On December 19th a terrible tempest - a driving rainstorm - hit the area and lasted for two days. On the 21st, the pastor went over to the church. His heart sank when he saw that the roof had leaked, causing a large area of plaster had fallen off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit, beginning about head high.

The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor, and not knowing what else to do but postpone the Christmas Eve service, headed home. On the way he noticed that a local business was running a market sale for charity so he stopped in. One of the items was a beautiful, handmade, ivory colored, crocheted tablecloth with exquisite work, fine colors and a Cross embroidered right in the center. (Crochet is a kind of lace that would appear around the edge of a tablecloth.) It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the front wall. He bought it and headed back to the church.



By this time, it had started to snow. An older woman running from the opposite direction was trying to catch the bus. She missed it. The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church for the next bus 45 minutes later.

She sat down and paid no attention to the pastor while he got a ladder and hangers to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. The pastor could hardly believe how beautiful it looked and it covered up the entire problem area.

Then he noticed the woman walking down the center aisle. Her face was like a sheet. 'Pastor,' she asked, 'where did you get that tablecloth?'

The pastor explained. The woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials, EBG were crocheted into it there. They were. These were the initials of the woman, and she had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria.

The woman could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had just gotten the Tablecloth. The woman explained that before the war she and her husband were well-to-do people in Austria.

When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave. Her husband was going to follow her the next week. He was captured, sent to prison and never saw her husband or her home again.

The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth; but she made the pastor keep it for the church. The pastor insisted on driving her home ... that was the least he could do. She lived on the other side of Staten Island and was only in Brooklyn for the day for a housecleaning job.

What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full. The music and the spirit were great. At the end of the service, the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door and many said that they would return.

One older man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighborhood continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn't leaving. The man asked him where he got the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to one that his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how could there be two tablecloths so much alike.

He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety and he was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and put in a prison. He never saw his wife or his home again all the 35 years in between.

The pastor asked him if he would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to Staten Island and to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier.

He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman's apartment, knocked on the door and he saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine.

A true story - submitted by Pastor Rob Reid

Activities

1. Draw a picture of the tablecloth. Include the crochet and embroidery.
2. Approximately how old do you think the tablecloth was? Give reason for your answer.
3. The tablecloth was used as a wall tapestry. What is a tapestry and where might you see them?
4. Who were the Nazis, and why might they have captured the lady's husband during World War 2?
5. Why do you think the lady and her husband had been separated for so long?
6. What difficulties might Jewish people have faced, having escaped Europe in World War 2, arriving in a new country?

The 'W' in Christmas

Each December, I vowed to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I had cut back on nonessential obligations -- extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and overspending.

Yet still, I found myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas. My son, Nicholas, was in kindergarten that year. It was an exciting season for a six-year-old. For weeks, he'd been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Pageant."

I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of the production. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher. She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation. All parents unable to attend that evening were welcome to come then. Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise.

So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I filed in ten minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down. Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats. As I waited, the students were led into the room. Each class, accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song.

Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as Christmas, I didn't expect anything other than fun, commercial entertainment - songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer. So, when my son's class rose to sing, "Christmas Love," I was slightly taken aback by its bold title.

Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snowcaps upon their heads. Those in the front row-center stage -- held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter C. Then, "H is for Happy," and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message, "Christmas Love."

The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her; a small, quiet, girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down -- totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W."

The audience of 1st through 6th graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W." Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised, and we all saw it together. A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen. In that instant, we understood the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos, there was a purpose for our festivities.

For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear:

"CHRISTWASLOVE"

Author unknown

Activities

1. Which country do you think this event took place in? Give reason.
2. What did Nicholas's mother expect a public school Christmas celebration to look like?
3. How different would it be in a Christian school?
4. How was the little girl able to contribute to the real meaning of Christmas?
5. Do you think people place too much emphasis on material things at Christmas? Give your ideas on how you think Christmas should be celebrated.

