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Publisher's Note

This book is a response to requests for a devotional book for adolescent boys. Seventeen writers graciously contributed stories and devotionals to bless the next generation. Many of these are based on the authors' experiences from their own adolescent years. We thank each writer who contributed.

- Myron Brubacher
- Dwight Burkholder
- Dale Eby
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- Wendall Schrock
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Jesus, as an adolescent, “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). May these devotionals help boys to follow Jesus' example as they become men.

God Is Not Surprised

Known unto God are all his works from
the beginning of the world. *Acts 15:18*

Most people enjoy a good surprise, and I am no exception. One of the best surprises I've ever been involved in was helping my brother Eldon visit "unannounced" for Christmas one year. He was serving on the mission field in Guatemala and was able to come home over Christmas. My wife and I were the only ones in our family who were in on the secret.

On the day of his flight, I took off work without revealing the secret nature of our mission. We drove several hours north to Washington, D.C., to pick up Eldon at the airport. He hadn't been home for nearly half a year, and we could barely contain our excitement as we finalized our "grand reveal" for the family and plotted a strategy. To create the maximum level of surprise, we planned to have Eldon pop out of some sort of box. We chose a big plastic barrel with the lid cut off. We wrapped the barrel with wrapping paper like a giant gift but waited to imprison Eldon and cover the top until the last minute.

When headlights illuminated our driveway, we stuffed Eldon into the barrel and quickly finished wrapping our "gift." We answered the door and ushered my family inside, telling them we wanted a family picture with the package in the

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foreground before we revealed the surprise. As we captured the scene on camera, Eldon rose from the barrel, popping through the paper, taking snapshots with his own camera.

It took a moment for our unsuspecting family members to grasp what was happening. Their pleasant portrait smiles turned to gasps and shrieks of amazement and disbelief. As you can imagine, it's rather shocking to find yourself in the same room with someone you thought was several thousand miles away. We still chuckle about the "Christmas that Eldon came home and popped out of a barrel" and the free "stress tests" that everyone received.

As humans, we are prone to being surprised. But our heavenly Father is never surprised. He knows everything, and nothing can catch Him off guard. In Isaiah 46:10, God says about Himself, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." God knows how things will end even before they begin. That's hard for us to understand, but God knows every detail even before it happens.

I don't know about you, but that sounds to me like Someone I'd trust. I certainly don't know the future, but I want to face it with the One who does. I encourage you to do the same and trust the God who is never caught off guard and is never surprised.

The Wasted Chase

Blessed are they which do hunger and
thirst after righteousness: for they
shall be filled. *Matthew 5:6*

Our family dog has a habit that I have been unable to break. She likes to chase things that are not there.

I remember the day it started. I turned the key of our riding lawn mower, and just as the engine roared to life, a mouse ran from underneath the mower. Our dog was standing close by. She erupted into a ball of destructive energy, crashing into and toppling over items on her hunt of a lifetime for the elusive mouse.

She never caught it.

That day started a routine. Without fail, whenever I start the lawn mower, the dog is there, muscles tense with anticipation, watching with laser focus, ready to pursue the mouse that might come out. There has never been another mouse.

I am becoming annoyed by the whole ordeal because the dog is wasting time on something she will never catch and that she really doesn't need. On the floor very close to where she thinks the mouse might emerge sits a dish of dog food meant specifically for a creature like her. It is tasty and designed with the necessary nutrients for a dog's well-being. Why would the dog want to pursue a morsel of mouse meat when she could enjoy a good meal?

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Silly dog.

This experience caused me to think about my human nature and the temptations that I experience to chase things that will only waste energy and leave me exhausted and empty-handed after it is over.

Silly me.

Satan does all he can to attract us to pursue worldly things that he says will make us happy. But at the end of his pursuits, we find only emptiness.

David tells us, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8). We can satisfy our hunger with spiritual food that helps us grow properly and experience lasting satisfaction.

Shooting a Blue Heron

But if ye forgive not men their
trespasses, neither will your Father
forgive your trespasses. *Matthew 6:15*

Turkey season had arrived, and my sons were on the lookout. Late one Saturday afternoon, one of my sons informed me that turkeys were in the field. Three of us walked toward the woods in case the turkeys took refuge there, while another of the boys tried to approach the turkeys in the field. Entering the woods, I looked into a deep gully and spied what I thought was a turkey. I did not understand how this turkey got from the field to the woods so quickly, but turkeys are fast. I looked down as the bird looked up at me. Knowing the distance was farther than I liked, I aimed high and shot.

Reaching the downed bird, my heart sank as I realized I had shot a blue heron instead of a turkey. I walked out of the woods and up to my three sons. They asked who had fired a gun. When I said that I had, they asked whether I had gotten anything.

“Yes. I did get something, but it wasn’t a turkey.” I told them I needed to call the game warden to report my illegal kill. They agreed this was the honest thing to do.

Back in the house, I dialed the game warden’s number, but he did not answer. In the busyness of the next few weeks,

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I did not try calling the game warden again. One day while visiting someone, I asked a man dressed in turkey-hunting camouflage what he thought would happen if someone shot a blue heron instead of a turkey. His eyes got big, and he said, “That is a federal bird, and the fine is \$10,000.”

I told him I had killed a blue heron and had not yet reported it. Later, my boys and I drove to the game warden’s house. I walked up to his porch trembling, because I knew I could not pay such a steep fine. I explained the situation to him.

A smile came across the game warden’s face. He looked at me and said, “I’ve never had a preacher in the corner before, but I believe I have one now.”

I said, “Yes, I am at your mercy.” Because it was an honest mistake and I reported it, he told me there would be no fine. We left the game warden’s house rejoicing because there had been forgiveness.

As I ponder the game warden’s pardon, I remember all that Jesus has forgiven me and others. I want to extend to others the same mercy that the game warden extended to me. Matthew 18:21, 22 says, “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Jesus’ answer shows us that His followers must maintain an attitude of forgiveness.