

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
1. God Is Not Surprised	1
2. The Wasted Chase	3
3. Shooting a Blue Heron	5
4. The Romans Road	7
5. Small Choices—Serious Consequences	9
6. The Church Ball Game	11
7. The Privilege of Reading	14
8. The Wicked Flees	16
9. When I Grow Up	18
10. Mistake-Prone	20
11. Tractor Tragedy	23
12. How God Speaks to Direct Us	25
13. Principles for Knowing God’s Will	27
14. Stop That Tractor!	29
15. As Newborn Babes	31
16. Lesson From a Kite	33
17. And God Saw That It Was Good	35
18. As Morning Light	37
19. Extraordinary Deaths	39
20. The Blessing of Siblings	42
21. Sibling Rivalry	44
22. It’s Not Fair	46

23. Giving Space	48
24. Be Kind	50
25. Falsely Accused of Stealing	52
26. Do You Honor Your Authorities?	54
27. Parable of Trigger, the Colt	56
28. Clean or Unclean?	59
29. Just As I Am	61
30. Blessed Assurance	63
31. Hope in Bad Times	65
32. Facing Giants With Faith, Not Fear	68
33. The Fish Vendor	71
34. Game Essentials: A Goal	74
35. Game Essentials: Rules	77
36. Game Essentials: Voluntary Participation	79
37. Opossums in the Wheelbarrow	82
38. Work	84
39. The Darts of the Devil	86
40. A Tongue, a Worm, or a Fishing Lure?	88
41. Guarding Against Sins of Your Youth	90
42. God Keeps the City	92
43. Regard for Life	94
44. He Is Able to Abase	96
45. Dwelling in Safety	98
46. A Pure Heart	100
47. Avoiding Lust	102
48. Do You Enjoy Sports?	104

49. Don't Be a Bully	106
50. Guilt	108
51. Caring in Dangerous Times	110
52. Be Ready to Let It Go	112
53. Personal Devotions	114
54. Fences	116
55. Be Faithful in the Little Things	118
56. Here to Help	120
57. Grandpas and Grandmas	122
58. Follow Me	125
59. Vengeance Is Mine	127
60. Pressed Down, Shaken Together	129
61. Pray Every Day	131
62. Standing Tall	134
63. Hiram and the Printing Press	136
64. Feeling Inferior	139
65. Caring for Animals	141
66. Your Mind: A Sponge	143
67. Friendship—God's Boomerang, Part 1	145
68. Friendship—God's Boomerang, Part 2	147
69. The Peril of Procrastination	149
70. Heroes, Abilities, and Faith	152
71. God's Providential Guidance	154
72. The Divine Guide: The Holy Spirit	156
73. God's Guidance Through Parents	158
74. The Brotherhood of Believers	160

75. The Bible: Our Light	162
76. God Guides Through Godly People	164
77. God Guides Through Circumstances	166
78. Hindrances to God's Guidance	168
79. The Lost Knife	170
80. Pinched Drip Tape	173
81. Be a Gentleman	176
82. Master of Breakthroughs	178
83. The Unholy Trinity	180
84. Peer Pressure	182
85. True Strength	185
86. A Strong Adolescent	187
87. Preparing for a Monarch	189
88. Laughing Larry	191
89. Parable of Church Members	193
90. Those Who Honor Me	195
91. Don't Be Rash	197
92. Teach Me	200
93. Who Am I?	202
94. Getting Acquainted	204
95. Deepening a Friendship	206
96. The Parable of the Kite	208
97. The Inheritance	210
98. Listening to Dad	212
99. Face Toward Home	215
100. Seeking God	217
Titles, Verses, and Readings	219

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

Climbing Upward

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?

Climbing Upward

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,