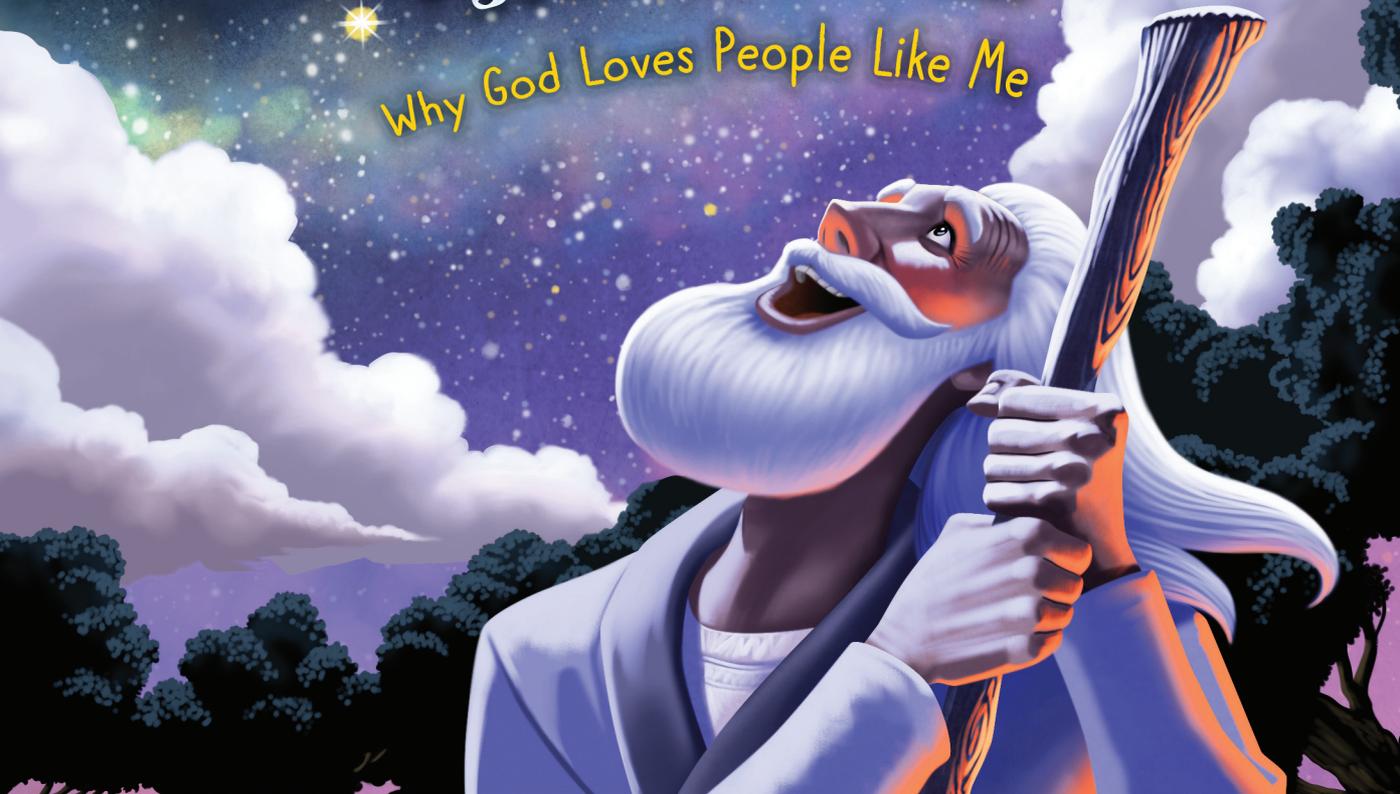


FRIENDS WITH GOD

STORY BIBLE

Why God Loves People Like Me



WRITTEN BY Jeff White

ILLUSTRATED BY David Harrington

BECAUSE I LOVE YOU

MATTHEW 27:27–28:10

BY
JESUS



I'M going to tell you the most important story ever told. It won't be easy for you to hear. But I promise you this: It has the happiest ending in the history of happy endings.

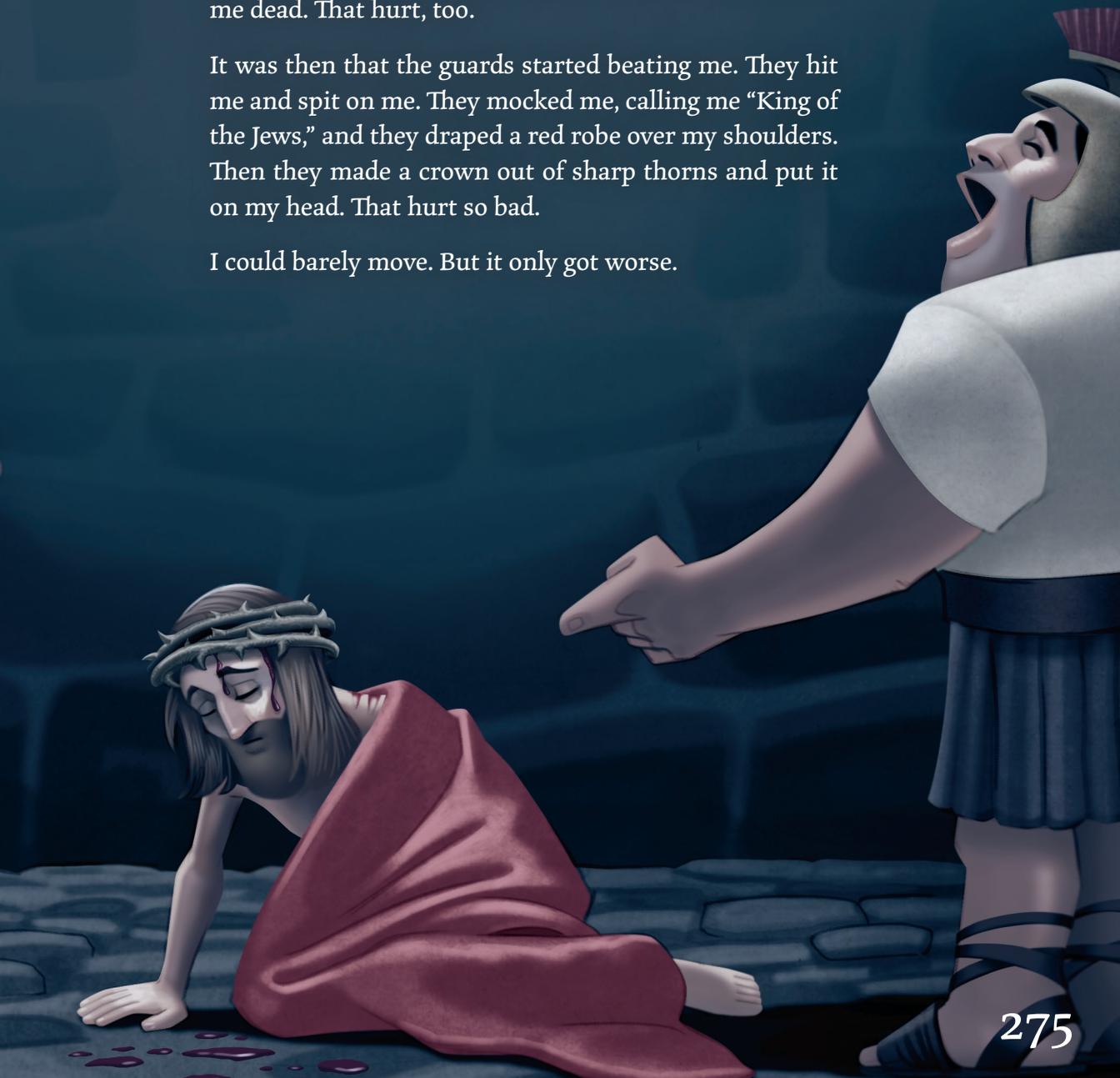
It started when the Roman soldiers arrested me while I was praying. One of my dearest friends had betrayed me to them, and all for a little bit of money. That hurt.



They took me to stand trial in front of Pontius Pilate, the local governor. The people accused me of being a traitor, although Pilate couldn't find anything I had done wrong. But the people insisted on killing me anyway. Just a week earlier they had been cheering me on! Now they wanted me dead. That hurt, too.

It was then that the guards started beating me. They hit me and spit on me. They mocked me, calling me "King of the Jews," and they draped a red robe over my shoulders. Then they made a crown out of sharp thorns and put it on my head. That hurt so bad.

I could barely move. But it only got worse.



THE guards made a big cross out of wooden beams. Even though I had no strength left, they made me carry that cross, with people along the road yelling at me. It was so heavy. Every step was torture. When I finally couldn't go any farther, they made another man carry that heavy cross for me.

They marched me up a hill to a creepy area they called the Place of the Skull. The pain was unbearable. I could barely catch my breath. The soldiers tried to give me a bitter drink to ease the pain, but I wouldn't take a sip. I needed to endure every jolt, every stab, every sting. And there were so many.

I had nothing left.

Still, they kept mocking me.

"If you're the Son of God, why don't you save yourself?" they shouted.





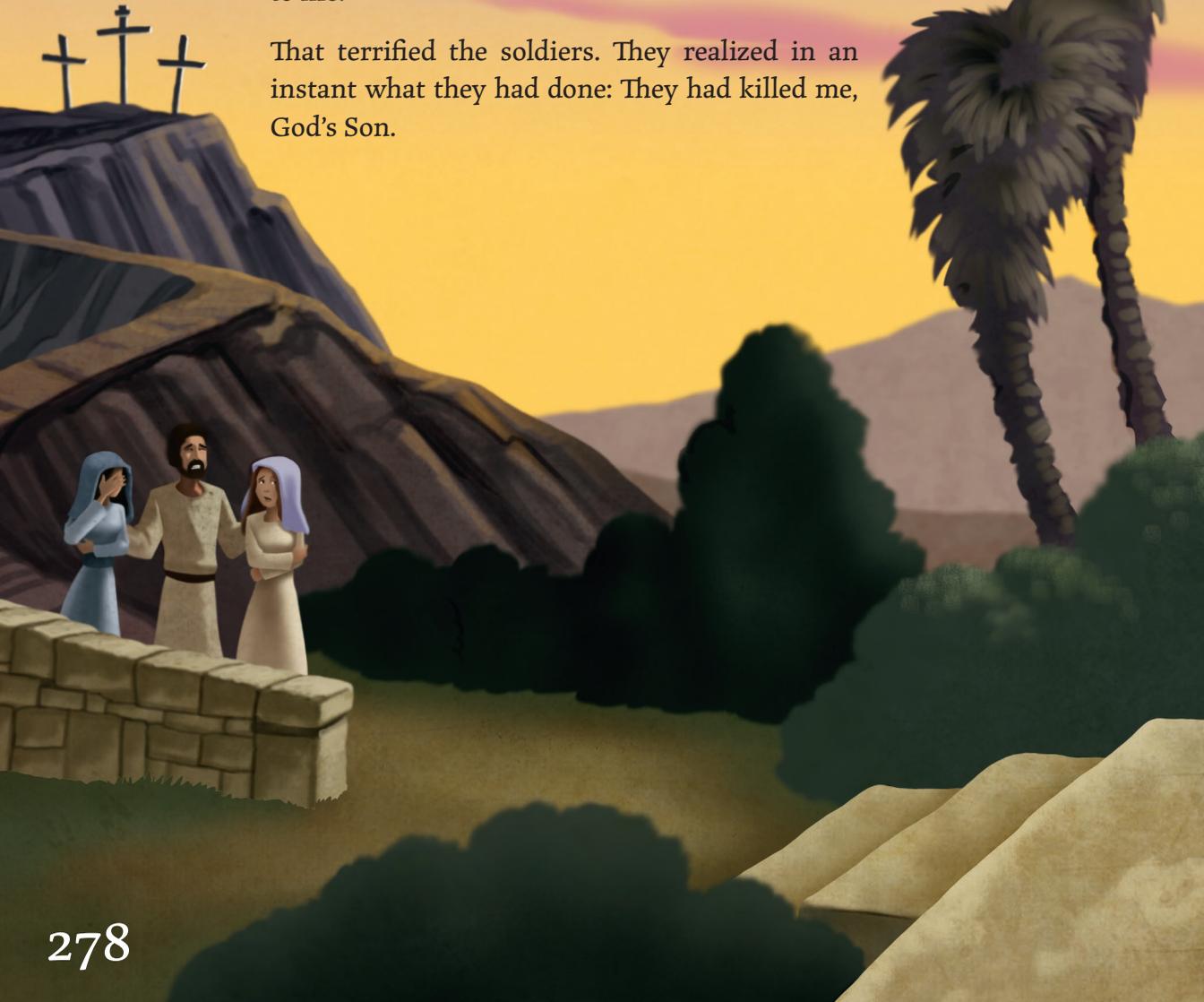
But they didn't know. They didn't understand that God wanted me to go through with this. They didn't know this was God's plan. Worst of all, they didn't realize how much I loved them. Every tear and every drop of blood was for *them*.

IT was almost the end. The sky turned black. Every breath was a struggle. I'd never felt more alone in my life.

I hung my head. I couldn't take another breath.

The moment I died, things got scary. The ground shook. Rocks split apart. People wept. The curtain in the Temple sanctuary split in half. Tombs opened up, and dead people began to come back to life.

That terrified the soldiers. They realized in an instant what they had done: They had killed me, God's Son.



Later, a rich man named Joseph took my body and wrapped it in cloths. Then he buried me in a tomb carved out of the rocks and rolled a big stone across the entrance.

Yet my killers were nervous. They'd heard me talk about coming back from the dead. They thought my followers might come to steal my body and claim I wasn't dead anymore. So they placed guards there to make sure nothing happened.

But something *did* happen.



THREE days later everything changed.

As soon as the sun cracked the morning sky, an earthquake rattled the tomb as one of God's radiant angels swept down and rolled the stone away. Then he hopped up and sat on it!

The guards were so scared they passed out.



Just then Mary Magdalene and my other friend named Mary came to visit the tomb. But when they saw the angel, their jaws dropped.

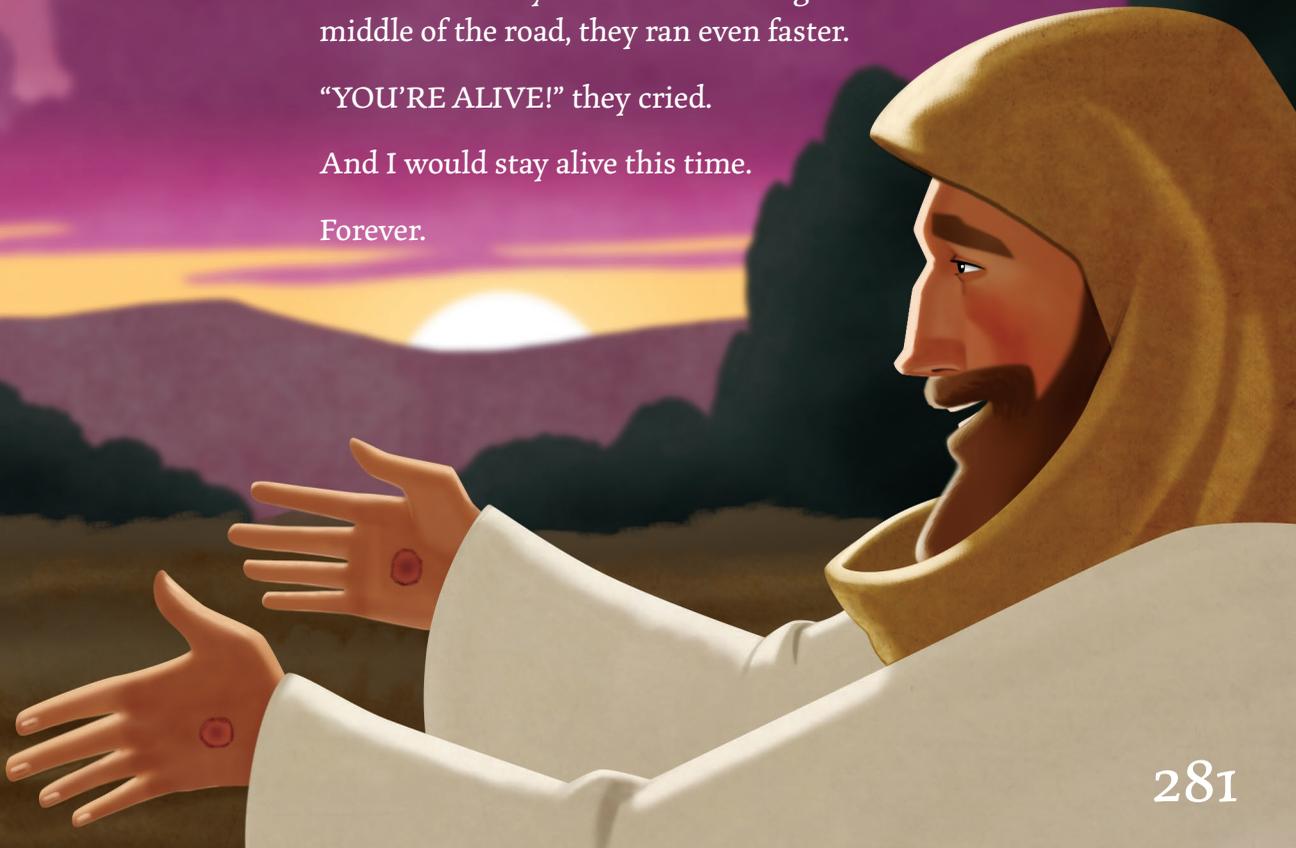
“Don’t be afraid,” said the angel. “Jesus isn’t here anymore. He’s alive again! Hurry and go tell his followers!”

Mary Magdalene and Mary took one glance at the empty tomb and started running fast! They were frightened and excited and shocked and thrilled all at the same time. And when they saw me standing in the middle of the road, they ran even faster.

“YOU’RE ALIVE!” they cried.

And I would stay alive this time.

Forever.



I didn't want to be tortured and killed. I dreaded it. Even so, I knew it was the only way to save everyone—everyone—from evil and help them find forgiveness for the wrong things they do.

I had to do it. And I wanted to do it.

And I did it because I love you. YOU. I can't say it enough. I love YOU, my friend.

All you have to do is believe it. Tell God right now what you think about me.

JESUS



WALKING —The— TALK

ACTS 3

BY
PETER



PEOPLE who know me say I can be rather, uh, bold. Yes, BOLD! I have the guts to do daring things, like that time John and I were walking to the Temple to pray.

It was a normal day: same busy streets, same noisy crowd, same old everything. But this one guy caught my attention. He was crippled, begging for coins like he always did. His skinny legs were weak and twisted, just like they'd been since the day he was born.

"Excuse me!" he called out. "Can you give me some money? Anything? Please!"

I stopped and stared at him for a moment. He stared back, his eyes pleading with us. I could feel God's love for this man flowing through me. I remembered when Jesus said we would be able to perform miracles just like he did.

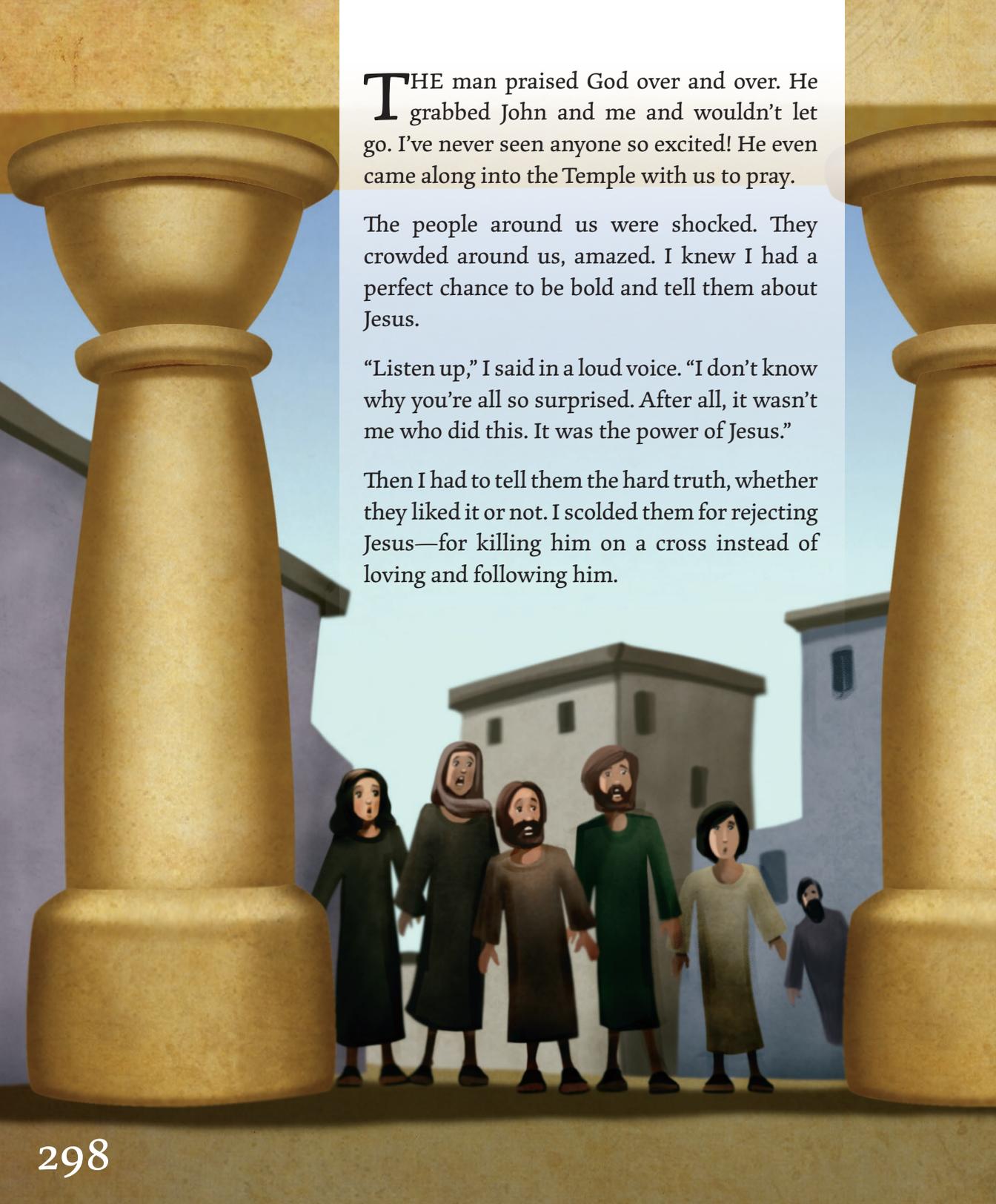
Now was my chance to do something bold.

"I don't have any money. But I can give you something way better," I said. Next I got bold, because of Jesus. I reached out my hand and spoke. "In the name of Jesus, get up and walk!"

He grabbed my hand and held it tight. Then, for the first time in his life, he jumped up. The man landed on his feet and then took a step. And then another. Next thing we knew he was leaping around like an overjoyed puppy!





The illustration shows a man with a beard and brown hair, wearing a green robe, standing in the center of a courtyard. He is surrounded by several other people, including women in dark robes and a man in a purple robe. They all have surprised or shocked expressions. The courtyard is flanked by two large, golden columns. In the background, there are simple, light-colored buildings under a clear sky.

THE man praised God over and over. He grabbed John and me and wouldn't let go. I've never seen anyone so excited! He even came along into the Temple with us to pray.

The people around us were shocked. They crowded around us, amazed. I knew I had a perfect chance to be bold and tell them about Jesus.

"Listen up," I said in a loud voice. "I don't know why you're all so surprised. After all, it wasn't me who did this. It was the power of Jesus."

Then I had to tell them the hard truth, whether they liked it or not. I scolded them for rejecting Jesus—for killing him on a cross instead of loving and following him.

“You didn’t really know what you were doing. Plus, Jesus had to die so all the prophecies would come true. But now’s your chance to do the right thing! Say you’re sorry for the wrong things you’ve done, and follow Jesus.

“Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed. He walked for the first time in his life. Just think what faith in Jesus can do for *you!*”



I can't even count how many beggars I've seen in my life. I've lost track of the number of sick or hurt people I've walked past over the years. But sometimes all it takes is one person to stand out and make a difference in people's lives.

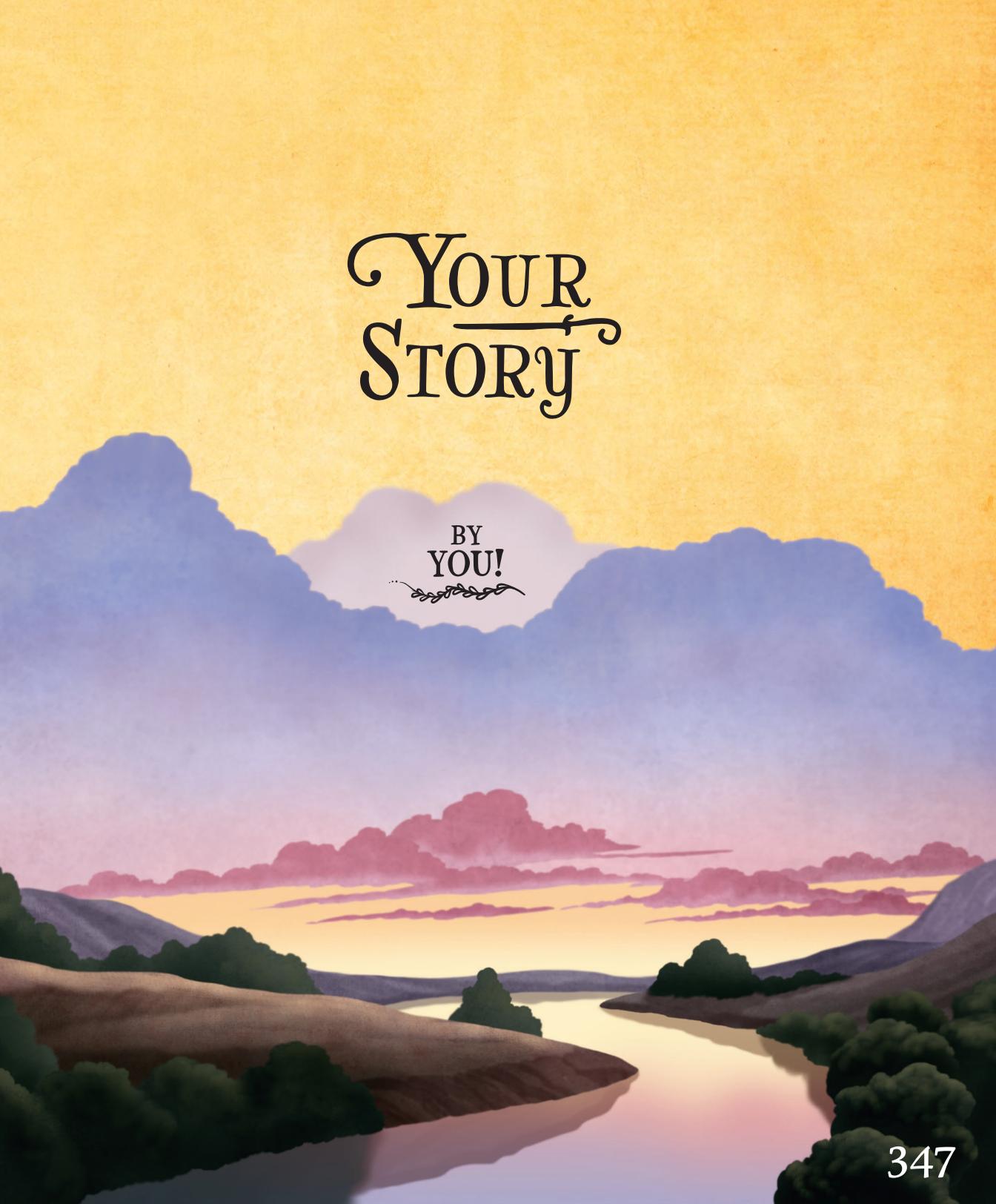
God gave me compassion for that man. And God knew that healing him would help people understand the power of Jesus.

Now, Jesus didn't come to make everyone perfectly healthy while they're living here on earth. Jesus came to give us a chance to live with him forever, a chance to be perfect with him long after we've left this earth.

Jesus knows what's most important: growing closer to him, just like you would with a best friend. Take some time right now to talk with Jesus in the same way you would talk with a friend sitting next to you.

《 PETER 》





YOUR STORY

BY
YOU!



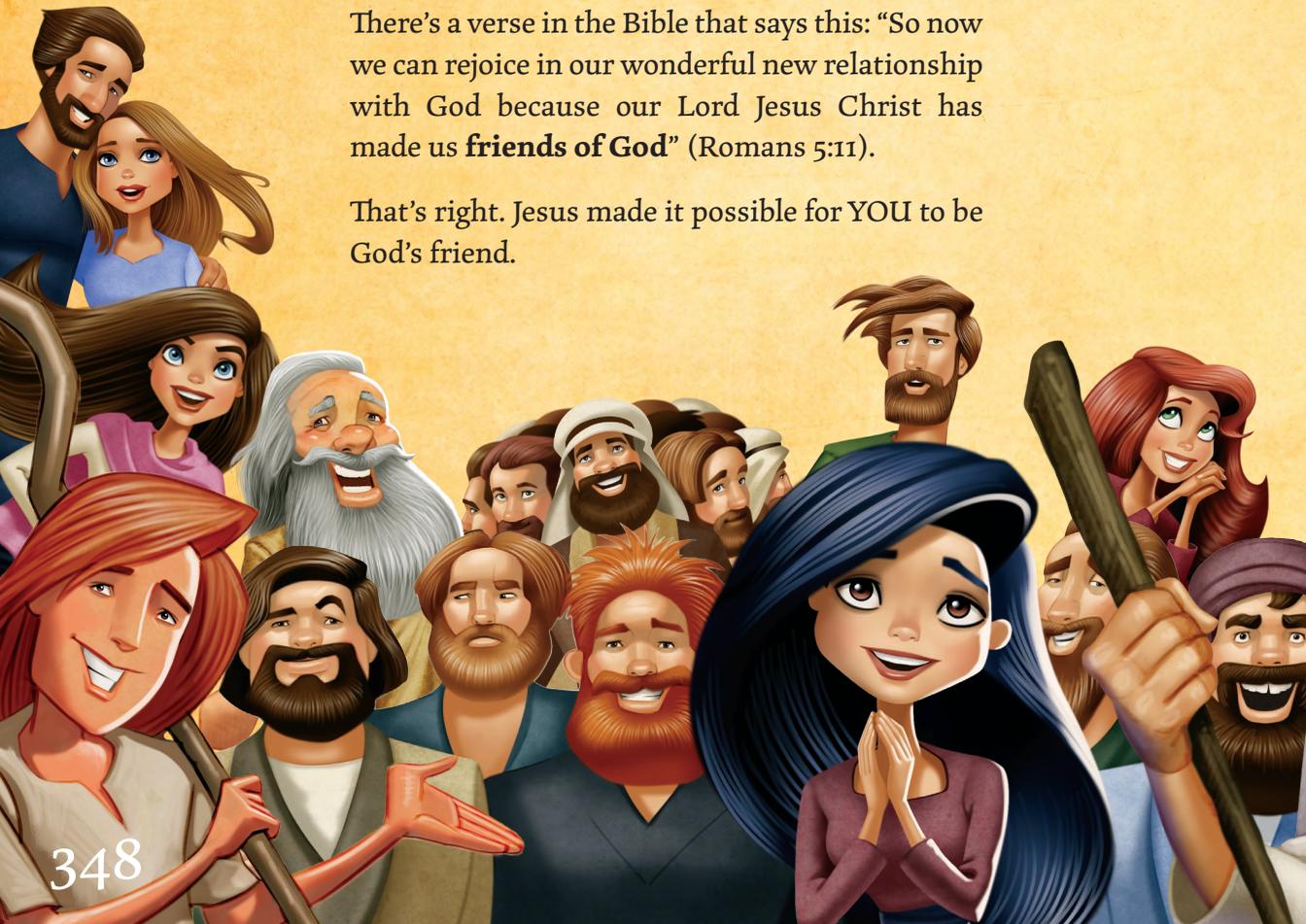
You are a living, breathing story.

Like he did for Adam and Eve, God has given you the gift of life...and the freedom to choose right or wrong. Like Joseph, your life will have countless ups and downs...and a purpose you might not yet understand. Like Thomas, you may have doubts from time to time, but Jesus can use your doubts to make your faith even stronger.

And through it all, God will be right by your side.

There's a verse in the Bible that says this: "So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us **friends of God**" (Romans 5:11).

That's right. Jesus made it possible for YOU to be God's friend.



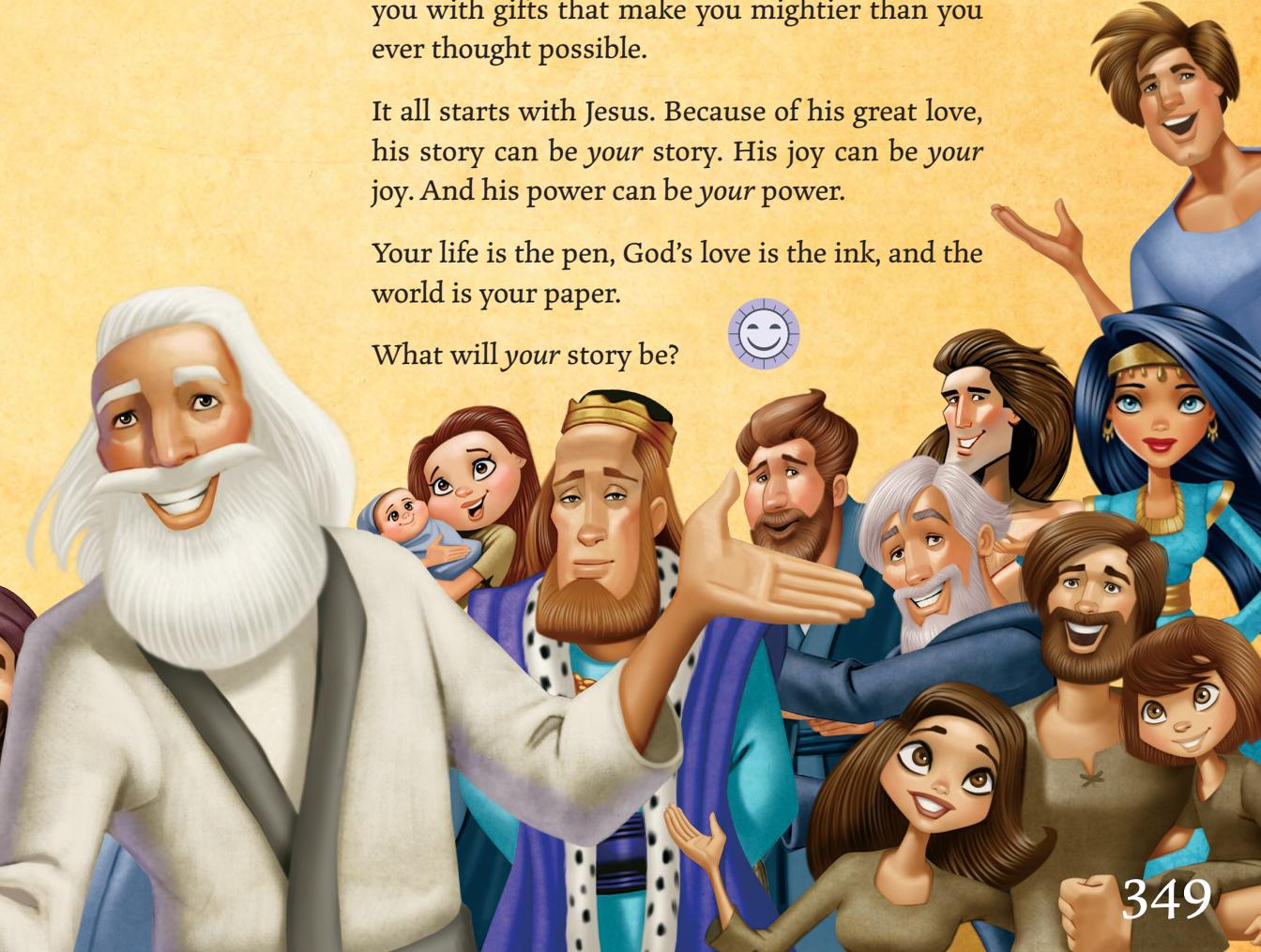
Just like Abraham and Sarah. And King David.
And Esther and Abigail. And Moses, Joshua,
Daniel, Rahab, Gideon, Mary, Paul, Silas, and all
the others you've read about in this book.

When God is your friend, your story changes.
Life becomes a new adventure, where every step
you take is a chance to experience God's love and
share it with others. Where you start to see God
at work all around you. Where God can surprise
you with gifts that make you mightier than you
ever thought possible.

It all starts with Jesus. Because of his great love,
his story can be *your* story. His joy can be *your*
joy. And his power can be *your* power.

Your life is the pen, God's love is the ink, and the
world is your paper.

What will *your* story be?



Help kids build a true friendship—with God!

Children meet Bible-times friends who share their thrilling stories, each from their own view.

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With each stunningly illustrated page, kids' faith grows as they draw close to the God who loves them and calls them *his friend*, too.



Help kids deepen their friendship with God *even more* by pairing this story Bible with the *Friends With God Devotions for Kids!*

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