

DON'T FORGET TO FLUSH!

A BATHROOM DEVOTIONAL FOR KIDS

by Kevin and Britta Alton



Illustrated by Graham Ross

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HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

STEP 1: Go into the bathroom.

STEP 2: Close the door (see chapter 1).

STEP 3: Read at least one chapter per bathroom visit.

STEP 4: Enjoy the fun facts and jokes along the bottom of the page.

STEP 5: Mark your place with a piece of toilet paper.

STEP 6: Don't forget to flush.

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I BET YOU SHUT THE DOOR THIS TIME.

Getting walked in on last night was a little embarrassing, but it wasn't the first time that leaving the door open backfired. When I was younger, I used to wiggle my legs while sitting on the toilet.



Once my pants dropped off my feet! I thought that was pretty funny until our dog, Muttley, trotted in, grabbed my pants, and took off.

"Man," I thought. "I'm gonna wish I had those in a minute."

Privacy is important, and not just for keeping your pants. Did you read the rest of the story in Matthew 6:5-15 I mentioned before? People sure have a bunch of different ways of praying. Some people like to pray for a *loooooonnnnnng* time and ask God to do a list of stuff. Others just seem to like the sound of their own voice. Maybe they're just nervous.



Jesus said in Matthew 6:5, "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."

When I pray alone, sometimes I don't even start with a name for God. God is already listening to me anyway—all the time. Not creepy listening. Just helpfully there. I like it. I don't think it matters *how* we pray, as long as we mean what we say.

But *listening* to God is just as important as what we say to God. The bathroom is a great place to find a little privacy for listening. You can't have a conversation if all you do is talk *at* somebody, right?

Why not take a moment and listen to the toilet flush before you go, huh?

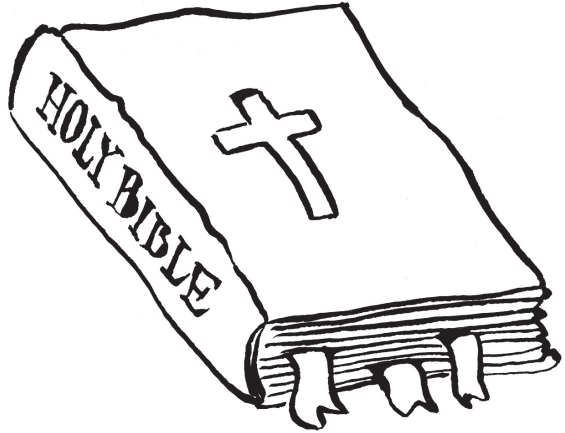
YOUR TURN

- What does it feel like when you listen during prayer?
- What helps you listen well?
- Ask a family member how they listen to God.



DO YOU EVER READ IN THE BATHROOM?

Okay, dumb question—you're in the bathroom and this is a book. Point taken. How do you decide *what* to read? Do you go for laughs, or maybe try to read up on sports to have better things to say in the lunchroom at school?



I usually pick what I read, but one summer I spent a week at my Aunt Teresa's house. The first time I remember going to the bathroom at Aunt Teresa's I settled in, got adjusted on the seat just right, and looked for something to read. What? Nothing in here but a *dictionary*.

It was worse than I'd feared: *not* a dictionary. It was *Bible*. A Bible! In the bathroom! An outrage. The Bible seems like one of those things you just aren't supposed to touch while you're on the toilet. Like food. Or Jasmin's retainer.



I wasn't sure I could do my business without reading *something*, so I grabbed the Bible and heaved it onto my lap. It was as heavy as a cinderblock. I flipped it open to Acts. Chapter 8, verse 26, actually. *"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'"* Angels. Cool. I kept reading. Philip runs into another guy without a name (it just says he's from Ethiopia) reading a copy of Isaiah. Suddenly I felt like I was in the story. *"Do you understand what you're reading?"* Philip asks in verse 30. The answer in 31: *"How can I unless someone explains it to me?"*

"I don't get it either!" I yelled. Everybody talks about how great the Bible is, but whenever I try to read it I bump into something weird or confusing. Who can explain it to *me*?

"ELI!" Aunt Teresa boomed. "Stop yelling and get out of there. And don't forget to flush."

"Maybe I'll ask her," I thought.

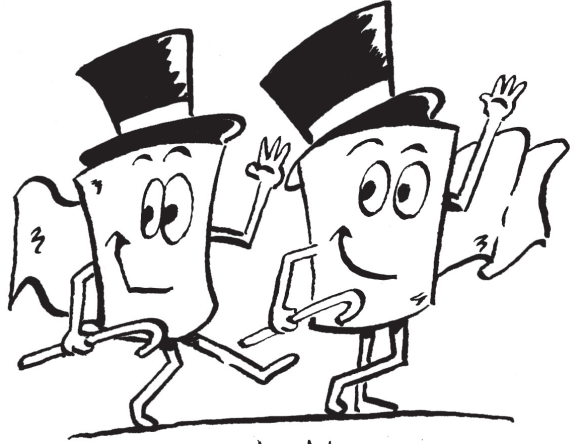
YOUR TURN

- When do you read the Bible? Do you try to read it like a regular book, or do you hunt for stories?
- It turns out questions about the Bible are a good thing—what questions do *you* already have about it?



**AFTER THINKING
OF THE STORY
FROM GENESIS
41 YESTERDAY,**

I went and read it again last night right before bed. That's got to be why I had such a crazy dream. In the dream I was sitting on my throne, just like you're doing right now. Minding my own



business. Doing my own business. That's when seven happy, puffy, adorably full toilet paper rolls came zip-lining down the shower curtain to land on the side of the tub. They were all dancing and laughing. I could hear the music. But just as my toe started to tap, I looked over and an empty toilet paper roll climbs out of my trash can and stands on the rim. It spots me and drops to the floor. While it rolls toward me, another empty roll climbs up and out of the can. One by one, seven empty toilet paper rolls roll over to my feet and then stand up staring at me grumpily. I thought they were going to say something, but then I heard Mom say, "Eli . . . it's time to wake up!"



Well . . . I can take a hint, God. When I came in here this morning, the first thing I did was make sure there was toilet paper on the roll. But then I also checked under the sink cabinet. I guess I might have freaked out a little if there had been seven rolls under there. Especially if they had started dancing. But there were three rolls. Right there in case I need them. Never to be wasted again in spider web building. I learned my lesson on that one.

In Genesis 41:31, Joseph told Pharaoh, *"The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe."* That was exactly how I felt when I was holding the empty tube after building the spider web. It was an awesome web, but it turned out to be a poor use of what I had.

Use a reasonable amount of TP, and don't forget to flush!

YOUR TURN

- **What kinds of things do you think it's wise to keep from running out of?**
- **Have you ever had a crazy dream? Do you think God could talk to you that way?**
- **Go ask someone you love if God has spoken to them in a dream.**



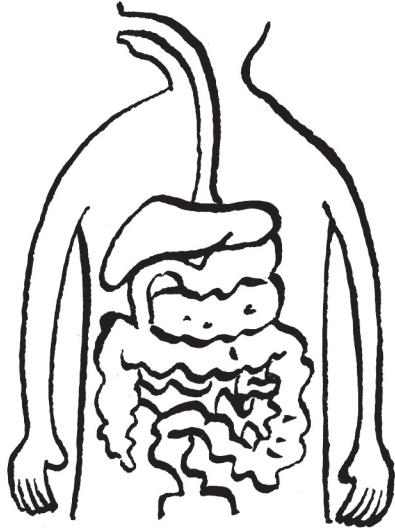
Q: WHY DID THE TOILET PAPER ROLL DOWN THE HILL?

A: TO GET TO THE BOTTOM!

JESUS MADE A POOP JOKE.

Well, maybe not a joke. And he didn't exactly say *poop*. But he totally mentions it, which is good enough. In fact, I wonder if he *did* make a poop joke and the writer was like, "Come on, Jesus. This is for posterity," before writing down Mark 7:18-19:

"Are you so dull?" he asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.'"



Out of the body! Good one, Jesus. I see what you did there. Jesus is using a metaphor. While I'd have just used the metaphor to get away with making a poop joke, Jesus seems to be using it to get at something else. I don't always pay attention in science, but I do seem to remember that food doesn't go to your heart when you eat. Jesus



appears to be up on his biology. So what he must be saying is that the things that can spoil us affect our heart, and . . . WOW. He doesn't mean our lub-dub heart. It's a metaphor stapled to another metaphor. Jesus is talking about our *inner* heart, the way-inside one that is kinda like the core of who we are. The one where we feel love for our grandparents, even if we forget to voluntarily hug them sometimes.

This just got a little heavy. Jesus isn't saying that everybody should get over hand washing. He's saying that we're worried about the wrong kind of keeping clean. If we get too focused on our outsides seeming super squeaky clean (like Christians sometimes try to do) we might forget to take care of our *insides*. I'll admit I was hoping for a dirty-hands permission slip from Jesus, but I think I may actually wash my hands more now. I can use it as a reminder about what I let get in to my heart.

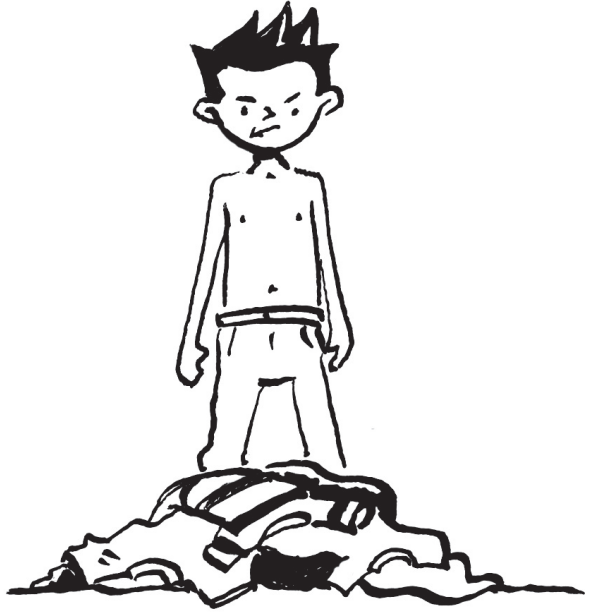
Don't forget to flush!

YOUR TURN

- **When do you act like other people think you should?**
- **When do you disagree with people about how to act?**
- **What would you say is the most important thing about who you are?**



I'M SUPPOSED TO BE GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL, but I just can't figure out what I want to wear. Nothing special is happening. It's just Wednesday. But I've tried on nine different shirts, and all nine of them are on the floor, because they just weren't . . . right, I guess. I put them on, looked in the bathroom mirror, said, "Nopey-noperson," and threw them down.



In a minute or two, Mom is going to come in and remind me that I actually picked out *all* of these shirts when we bought them. I've worn them all, too. I've probably got at least three really happy memories attached to each. But I just can't figure out which one is right for *today*.



I finished reading that story last night in 1 Samuel 16 about Samuel trying to pick a new king. It was sort of the same deal—there wasn't anything *wrong* with Eliab or Abinadab or Shammah or the rest. Probably good-looking guys of various sizes. But God had something specific in mind. Like me, looking for a shirt.

In verse 12, this kid David gets brought in. He's the youngest son. The Bible says, "*He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.'*" Totally unexpected.

So it isn't *wrong* to be good looking—I'm just not supposed to make it the most *important* thing. OH SWEET! Mom just opened the door a little and stuck her hand in holding my favorite shirt. Whenever it's clean, it's the first one I set out to wear. I better get the rest of these back in my closet.

YOUR TURN

- What does God see in you that is good?
- How can you take care of your appearance without it becoming the most important thing?
- Don't forget to flush!



I'M GOING TO TEACH YOU AN EXPERIMENT.

(It's also a way to measure growth.)

The question is, "What does *that* weigh, plus *me*?" You need yourself, a scale, and one other thing. The boring way to find out the answer is to weigh an object on the scale and add that number to your weight. If you're like me, you already know what you weigh dressed, dressed with shoes, undressed, and even with *just* shoes on.

The *fun* way to do it is to pick up the item and weigh both of you at the same time. What do all the towels plus you weigh? What about with all the magazines?

I started paying attention to our scale when a basketball coach told me that I wasn't big enough to play. But the truth is, I've been growing my whole life. I've only documented the last few years, but they tell



me I'm "a work in progress." Do they just mean size? We don't know what Jesus weighed, but Luke 2:40 says that he was growing too: "*The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*" Luke 2 is a big deal, if you haven't read it. Angels talk about Jesus; he gets declared the Messiah—stuff like that. Then after this verse Jesus runs away for a minute. Normal.

Growing in size isn't the only measurement of maturity, and it sure isn't a measure of our worth. I don't think angels told my parents how I'm going to turn out. At least Mom and Dad haven't mentioned it. I'm still growing though, just like Jesus. I wonder how he kept track? Marks on the door frame above his head? Scales can't measure *wisdom*. I know I'm less nervous about praying out loud than I used to be. A lot of Bible stories sound familiar now. I guess I'm growing in wisdom too! Keeping track of how big you are and what you and the dog weigh with a scale is great, but there's other growth that's pretty important too.

Another way to measure things is time, which reminds me: you better go. No, I mean *leave*. Don't forget to flush!

YOUR TURN

- **What's something you specifically remember finding out about God?**
- **Who do you look up to for their faith? How can they help you grow in yours?**



SOMETIMES I WISH

my little sister Jasmin was a brother. Jim, maybe. I don't know. The name wouldn't really matter. But if I had a brother, then it wouldn't be quite so obvious who it is that can't always hit the mark when using the toilet.



We may be going a little close to Too Much Information territory, but I bet you know what I'm talking about. Even though I have definitely learned the lesson of lifting the seat so no sprinkles offend, sometimes when I'm yawning or stretching or distracted, I miss. You know. The target. Not by a mile. And I don't realize it from my perspective right then, but when I come in later (if I look really hard for it) there's a tiny, miniscule, almost imperceptible piddle puddle. Unless you are Jasmin. Or Mom. And then, evidently it's all you can see.

When Jasmin made a big stink about it, I tried to convince Mom that some of that particular mess was probably partly her mess also.



Mom didn't even respond. She just stared at me until I blinked and looked away.

"Yeah, you're right. It's my particular mess."

I went ahead and cleaned up my piddle puddle. It got me to thinking about Romans 14:14 again, so I went and looked at it afterward. Verse 13 says, *"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another."* I can get behind *that* part for sure. Then it continues, *"Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister."* So there it is again. It would be easier if my sister was a brother. He wouldn't mind. But I get that it doesn't mean "brother or sister" in that way. Mostly what it's saying is that my puddle is an obstacle for *others* that I have the power to prevent. Or at least clean up afterward. Consideration. It makes sense when you think about it. Oh yeah, don't forget to flush! That's considerate, too.

YOUR TURN

- Have you ever tried to ignore a bad habit in hopes that no one else notices?
- When something you do becomes an obstacle in your brother's or sister's or anyone else's way, how do you react when you become aware of it?
- Go ask someone close to you if they know of a bad habit you can try to get rid of.



DON'T MIND ME. I'm just going through the reading materials that we've gathered in here. *Everybody* keeps different stuff in the bathroom to read. Unless they don't read in the bathroom, which is totally WEIRD. And probably boring. What are ya gonna do, just go to the bathroom and leave?



Last week, my Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Johnson, started me thinking about what I read in here. She was teaching on Hebrews 5:11-12. The verses go like this: *"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"*

She put me on the spot because she knows Jasmin and I read a lot. She asked if my favorite book was the same as Jasmin's favorite book to read. "Of course not!" I said. Jasmin has just started chapter books and I like complicated adventure stories, sometimes even books in a



series. Then Mrs. Johnson asked if my mom's favorite book was the same as my favorite book. "Of course not!" I said again. Mom's books have lots more words and lots less adventure. "But what if you had stopped growing in what you read and learned?" Mrs. Johnson asked. She pointed out that if I still relied on my old picture Bibles, I might not even hear these verses Paul spoke to the Hebrews.

When Paul said "You need milk, not solid food," he was saying people were stuck when they should have been going deeper in their faith. So I guess it's a good thing we have lots of different stuff in here to read. A couple of years ago I really enjoyed some of these same books that Jasmin reads. And sometimes they're a good easy reminder for me. But it would get really boring if I couldn't go deeper. Mrs. Johnson says it is "growing deeper" when you move on to more complex things.

I wonder what Mom keeps in her bathroom? Or Dad? I'm going to go check it out. Don't forget to flush when you're done with your own reading!

YOUR TURN

- What are some simple truths about God that you go back to and remember often?
- Can you use those simple truths to figure out more complicated things about God?
- What is the most challenging thing you've learned when reading about God?



I CAN SEE WHAT YOU'RE THINKING.

"Why, Eli," you're asking yourself, "do you have a laminated sign and painter's tape in the bathroom?" Well, I'll tell you.



I have realized that my best decisions aren't made in a panic. With that in mind, I've decided in a non-panicked state to remove the decision-making process from a situation where I

regularly panic—by leaving myself instructions on a sign. The sign will actually benefit everyone at our house, which is something I've been trying to do lately. You should try it. Here's what it says:

1. DON'T PANIC.

(This I wrote in large, friendly letters. I also don't follow directions well in a panicked state, so I wanted to fix that at the beginning.)



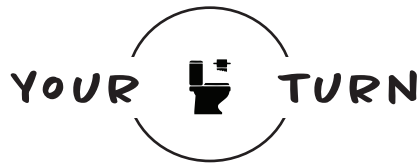
2. TURN OFF THE WATER THINGY.

3. USE THE PLUNGER. TRY NOT TO GET WATER EVERYWHERE.

4. TURN WATER BACK ON; TEST FLUSH. REPEAT STEPS 3 AND 4 AS NEEDED.

I found something in Proverbs 4 that applies to lots of stuff, even outside of the bathroom. Proverbs 4:13 says, *"Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life."*

And without it, sometimes your life flashes before your eyes. That phrase, "for it is your life," really jumped out at me. A lot of times you forget you need instruction in your life until you *really, really* need the instruction. Like when I thought I was going to save the day for Jasmin and we ended up worse than when things started. So now I'm going to let the front of the toilet tank hold on to our instructions. And if there's nothing to panic about, maybe I won't forget to flush.



- What other kinds of instructions have you learned about from the Bible?
- Who teaches or instructs you in your faith?
- What is something you've learned recently about faith?



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I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT I KIND OF GOT A BIG HEAD ABOUT THE WHOLE TOWEL/SERVICE THING.

When I saw Mom and Jasmin's minds get blown by it, I did it at Dad's place too. I had everyone looking at me strangely as I hummed and went about routinely making sure everyone had a clean, dry towel to use. For a minute, I started to think maybe I was doing a better job of this whole service thing than anyone else.



It was Dad who stepped in to talk with me as I was straightening the towels I had just situated on their hooks by the shower at his place. "Whatcha up to, Eli?" Well, you don't have to ask me twice to toot my own horn. I told Dad about Jesus washing his disciples' feet and explained how I was showing courtesy by serving others. My eyebrows rose a little as I said, "Just like Jesus!" I'm pretty sure that's when Dad knew I was a little self-inflated. He played it cool though, and fortunately didn't just take a needle to my ego.



He said, "Let's go look at that again, son. I'm curious to see how the rest of that foot-washing, towel-wielding story goes." So we found it and read it again. This time, Dad made sure I kept reading through what Jesus said after washing the disciples' feet—all the way to verse 16, which read, *"I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."* When Dad suggested I re-read that verse, I started to understand what he was doing. As I looked at it again, I realized that I had started to pat myself on the back so hard I wasn't thinking straight. Jesus had not washed his disciples' feet because he wanted to be *right* or to blow anyone's mind. He did it as a way to show humility and love.

I think I'm going to keep trying to keep the towels in order, but I'll work on not letting myself feel too puffed up about it. You, though, should definitely remember to flush.

YOUR TURN

- How does it feel when you do something nice for someone and they don't thank you?
- How do you think your focus could change to handle it more like Jesus?
- Watch for someone showing courtesy who might ordinarily be overlooked.



THIS ONE TIME DAD TOOK US TO THE AQUARIUM IN TOWN.

We especially love the otters, because . . . because *otters*, dude. Otters are awesome. Before we left the aquarium that day, we all went to the bathroom. Dad and I went to the one for boys and Jasmin went to the one for girls. Obviously. We were done first so we went and stood near—but not *creepy* near—the ladies' room door, and waited.

And waited. Aaaaannnd waited. She seemed to be taking forever. I started comparing the outlines on the signs for men's and ladies' room doors, and wondering why whoever made them thinks that all ladies wear dresses all the time. At first I thought Dad looked a little restless, but I eventually realized he was getting worried.

"What are you worried about, Dad?" I asked. "Jasmin is on the other side of that door," he said, "and there's not a lot I can do to see if she's okay. I'm sure she's fine; I just get nervous sometimes." "Ask, and the door shall be opened to you," I replied. "It's in the Bible."



"What?" Dad's head turned. I suddenly had his full attention. "Ask, and it shall be opened," I answered. "Mom told us about it." I thought he knew that one.

"Your mom is a smart lady," Dad said, "and I bet she told you *knock* and it will be opened, because that's what Luke 11:9 says: '*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*' It's about reaching out in faith, and it's not a bad idea. That door is an obstacle between us and Jasmin right now, but there's nothing separating us from God. What say we pray for Jasmin for a minute?" Sounded good to me. We bowed our heads and Dad prayed. As we said, "amen" together, we opened our eyes to find Jasmin standing next to us, staring at us like we'd lost it. "What are you two doing?" she asked.

"Just doing a little asking instead of knocking," Dad said, smiling at me.

Don't forget to flush!

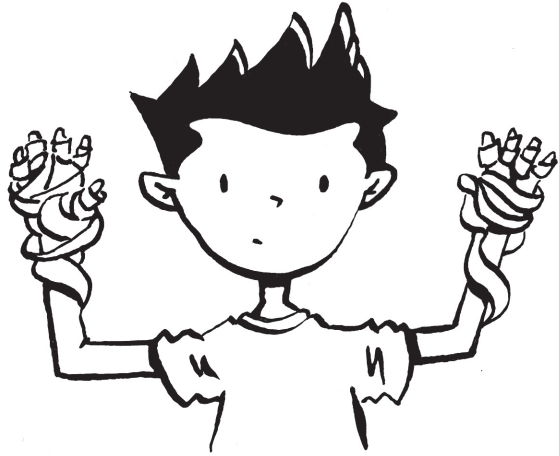
YOUR TURN

- Doors are a physical obstacle; when have you run into an obstacle trying to understand something about faith or God?
- When has something *seemed* like a door, getting in the way of you accomplishing something?



**MY AUNT TERESA
HAS A 17-STEP
PROCESS FOR
GETTING A
PUBLIC TOILET
CLEAN ENOUGH**

to do your business that she tried to teach me when I was little. If I have to use a public toilet, I only do an abbreviated version of what she does, but I do generally make sure I'm about to sit on



something that I can trust is safe for my booty. The other day I had a classic bad public bathroom experience. Right as I walked through a stall door and saw the not-empty toilet bowl, someone else came in behind me and took the only other stall. Believe me, I thought about just walking out and holding it. But Aunt Teresa's lessons came in handy. Using toilet paper like a biohazard shield, I cleaned the seat and did the ballet move of standing on one foot, using my other to press down on the handle to flush. I don't like loud toilet flushes, but I also don't like a mess. Even if it's not my own. It almost brought tears of thanksgiving to my eyes to see that there were paper seat covers in a box on the wall.



Later that day I was reading Isaiah 58 because that's where my Bible fell open to, and Isaiah was fussing at people to do good things for others. I read verses 6-9, but it was verse 8 that had me laughing. It says, *"Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard."* I've always liked a good Bible verse about dawn breaking forth, but when I saw "the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard," I fell over laughing. That little piece of paper between my rear and the toilet. My rear guard. Ha! That's funny, God. I love it when God cracks me up.

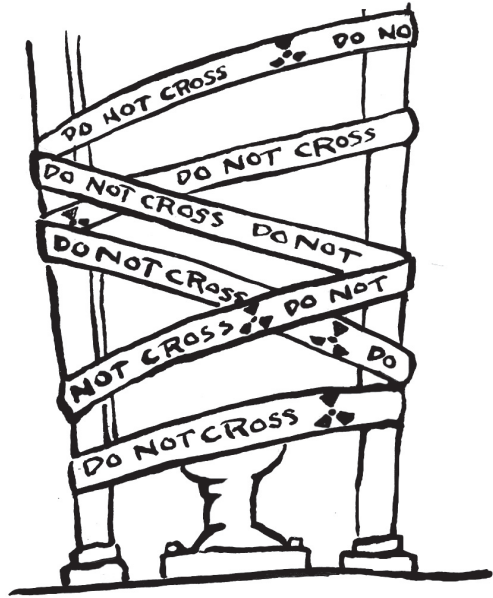
But for real, it's kind of saying God's got my back. Or my backside. I just need to keep doing the good stuff. Hopefully I'll continue having chances to keep doing good stuff. Know what I just realized? I almost never forget to flush when I'm using a public bathroom. I wonder why that is? Don't forget to flush, wherever you are.

YOUR TURN

- When Isaiah said, "your light will break forth like the dawn," what do you think he meant?
- What ways can you do good for others in unexpected places?
- How can you develop a habit of leaving places in better shape than you found them?



SOMETIMES I THINK
LIFE IS LEARNING
ONE THING JUST
IN TIME TO REALIZE
YOU DON'T KNOW
SOMETHING ELSE.



I'm in the school bathroom. It's not a normal bathroom break time. If I can just be honest here—I hate pooping with other people in a public bathroom. I mean, sure, you're in a stall, but that only takes care of the sense of *sight*, if you follow my reasoning. I don't want to *hear* somebody else do that, and I try to return the favor. So if I *must* do that during the day, I wait and excuse myself from class.

This time being alone backfired on me. (Stop it; that's not a joke.) When I finished, I flushed—and the terror began: not quite the right flushy noises, water coming up instead of going down, full engagement of fight-or-flight in my sympathetic nervous system. Fortunately it stopped before it got to the rim, but now I've got a situation. *I know*



how to fix this, but THERE'S NO PLUNGER IN HERE. I'm trying to grow up, I swear. But I keep doing things that make grownups sigh at me like I'm just a dumb kid.

Last month we had Youth Sunday at church. Our theme verse was 1 Timothy 4:12: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."* I can't prove it, but I think they use that verse every year for Youth Sunday. I liked it though, because it talks about a lot of what I've been trying to do, especially when I'm around adults.

Yet here I am with a toilet full of troubles and bubbles. I guess I could have looked around to see if there was a plunger before I started, but who wants to go through life assuming the worst-case scenario is going to happen?

I've got to focus. I'm smart enough to handle this. You focus too—don't forget to flush.

YOUR TURN

- **When have you had to rise above a situation—whether you created it or not?**
- **How do you approach adults when you need help with a problem they don't know about yet?**



IN ROME, PIPES WERE ORIGINALLY MADE FROM LEAD, WHICH IS "PLUMBUM" IN LATIN. A PERSON WHO WORKED WITH LEAD WAS CALLED A PLUMBARIVS.

**YES, I'M STILL
STANDING IN
FRONT OF THIS
VERY FULL TOILET.**

Yes, the bell is about to ring. Yes, there's about to be a million people in here. The very next verse after our Youth Sunday theme verse is 1 Timothy 4:13, and it says, "*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*"



No, I don't think Jesus is coming to bring me a plunger, and no, I'm not going to try to preach my way out of this. But I had that verse in my head a couple of weeks ago in a sort of similar situation. We were out for fast food, and when I went to the bathroom, the door banged into something before I could get it all the way open. I squeezed around it, and discovered the bathroom door had banged into the stall door (why do fast-food restaurants have tiny



bathrooms sometimes?). The stall door was blocked open by a kid a couple of years older than me in a wheelchair. He was a little red-faced and looked embarrassed.

"I stopped up the toilet," he said. "I'm pretty new to this wheelchair, and I wasn't very good at plunging even before I got hurt playing baseball. Any chance you can help me?"

Now you might be thinking, "What a horrific, disgusting mess," and you'd partially be right. But all I was thinking was, "a chance to shine, this time without ruining socks." I could teach him. He might not be able to actually *do* it until his injury healed, but I could teach him—devoting myself to it, so to speak. If it went wrong, he could probably roll away faster than me anyway.

It went perfectly. My confidence in myself is restored. Now, to deal with this toilet at school. I'll keep you posted. Don't forget to flush.

YOUR TURN

- How do memories of past successes help you when you're trying to lead or teach a friend or group something?
- How do your mistakes over time sometimes build into an eventual success?

