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God Can Do Far Beyond All We Can Imagine

As I hope you can tell, we had a great time at Vacation Bible School this week! We had a fabulous leadership team of mostly youth and a few adults that kept everything running smoothly, enabling the children to have a blast while they learned about God. I am so thankful that our VBS empowers youth to step up into strong leadership roles, trust them with the responsibility for not only relationship building with our kids, but also with content leadership too, through sharing Bible stories and helping kids connect with the lessons of the week. They really did a wonderful job, so let's give them a hand!

I have to say that I was impressed with this year's VBS material. There are times when you purchase a fully loaded curriculum, only to be disappointed by the lessons, theology, or the disconnection between the elements. I have to say that this was one of the best curriculum years that I remember. The lessons made sense and were easy for the kids, young and old to learn and apply. The music was actually pretty good this year, and it enhanced the Bible lessons in a way that really drove home the message over and over again. Overall, a great program! The basic premise of the journey to space in this year's theme of "To Mars and Beyond" was that our spiritual journey runs on five elements of faith that we needed to fuel up on to sustain us along the way: Faith, Boldness, Kindness, Thankfulness, and Hope. And as I just said, the songs pulled out different aspects of these elements and helped us to see how to apply them.

On Monday, we turned to our Old Testament stories and learned about Daniel and how he was sent into a lion's den as punishment for his commitment to pray to God instead of King Darius. We learned that when we have faith and trust that God will see us through the struggles we face in life, God is always there for us. Although we might not experience such a miraculous rescue as this story tells, God can take anything the world throws at us and make it work for our good. Like Daniel, we can trust God to help us rise above and beyond the trouble we face and to do amazing things in and through our lives!

On Tuesday, we learned about how Queen Esther, a Jewish woman in hiding, married to King Xerxes risked her life by standing up for her people when the king's advisor was trying to have the Jewish people persecuted and killed. Despite the risk she took outing herself and

speaking up to the king, she trusted that God would give her the strength and courage to do the right thing in the face of hatred and abuse of power. Unfortunately, hatred, prejudice, and persecution did not end with our Bible stories; there are still people today who would demean and oppress those who are different from them. Just like Queen Esther, we are called to use our position, influence, and resources to stand up for others...and just as with Queen Esther, God will be faithful to sustain us and give us boldness to go far beyond what our fears convince us is possible!

On Wednesday, we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan and learned that according to Jesus, kindness goes beyond being “nice,” and beyond merely showing compassion to friends, loved ones, and people who share our beliefs. We are called to extend kindness to strangers and even people we see as enemies. Jesus calls us to be like the good Samaritan, putting kindness and love into action, going beyond to help all who need it, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or cultural background.

On Thursday, we explored the story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers, enabling them to return to community life and active religious observation. Yet of the 10 who were healed, only one of the men returned to say thank you to Jesus. While I'm sure the other 9 were also thankful, expressing our thanks is an important part of being in relationship with others, and that includes our relationships with Jesus. Like the Samaritan in this story, we are called to go beyond simply FEELING thankful to EXPRESSING our thanks... by making a practice of showing gratitude in tangible ways—and that's for the big and little things in life. As God's people, we are called to be thankful in word, deed, and attitude in all circumstances.

On Friday, we wrapped up our week with the story of the Walk to Emmaus, where two men had a transformational encounter with the Risen Jesus. At the beginning of the story, the men were distraught because Jesus had been crucified, and while they had heard of the resurrection, they still did not yet understand what that meant. But Jesus' presence and comforting words helped them move beyond the discouragement of recent events into a better understanding of God's power. We talked about how the message of Jesus can still do that for us today too! No matter how challenging things get in our lives, how chaotic our world seems, with racism and gun violence, hatred and power struggles; the hope of Christ is that evil and hatred WILL NOT have the last word. That hope rises and love wins! While it is tempting in times of trouble to become discouraged or feel that God isn't who we thought, Jesus reminds us to have hope that God will help us move beyond our present troubles into a future with new life and new hope!

FAITH, BOLDNESS, KINDNESS, THANKFULNESS, AND HOPE! These are core elements of our spiritual journey, and we just spent the week looking what they mean and look like in our own lives. Now it's your turn! I invite you to go into your week, with these rolling around your head and heart. Wrestle with what it looks like for you to have **faith** in the face of adversity... Reflect on how God is calling you to share your love and **kindness** with ALL people, even when that means standing up to others with holy **boldness**. Express your **thankfulness** to God not only through thoughts and prayers, but also through words and actions. And no matter

how hard things get, never lose **hope**, for God's love will prevail... for God can use even the struggle for good. May we all use these lessons to fuel up and stay strong in faith and action throughout our journey, so that through us, God can do far more than we could ask or imagine. Amen.