

## **BLACK SHEEP**



Cocoa Puff came to the sheep ranch when she was one week old. "The only black lamb in the flock," said the master with a smile. "With a mind of her own," said the master's wife, when she brought out the milk bottle. "Just see how she butts her way around!"

It was not long before Cocoa Puff knew every cobwebby

corner in the barn and every bend in the pasture

fence. The other sheep soon got used to her and let their little white lambs join in the wild games that Cocoa Puff thought up. Some days it was chase-my-tail and jump-over-thebucket. When it rained and they had to be penned up in the barn, she found perfect places to hide under the hay feeders. Cocoa Puff loved being the leader. She loved being important. But often her wild ways would get her into trouble.

"Where's that black lamb?" asked the master's wife one day. "I've called her to come for her milk, but she's nowhere to be seen." Poor Cocoa Puff was stuck under the hay rack! She had crawled there in one of her hide-away games, but it was getting a bit small for her now. "Baa! Baa!" she called until the master's wife came to pull her out.

The next afternoon Cocoa Puff was trying to squeeze through the pasture gate when she got her leg tangled in the latch-chain. "Baa! Baa!" she called. The master came tromping down the lane to rescue her. "Now listen, Cocoa," he said, as he lifted her up. "You aren't to be squeezing through the fence. It's not safe out here for little lambs like you."

Cocoa Puff tossed her curly head and rolled her eyes. She couldn't see anything dangerous outside the fence. Running down the lane would be so much fun! But she stayed in the pasture and played with the other lambs like a good sheep. For a little while at least. But Cocoa Puff, the black lamb, didn't like to be quiet and good very long.

It was a twisted wire that she got caught in next. She had been wanting a rubbing, and the master's wife had been too busy to give her one. The corner fence post by the pond had looked like a good spot to itch. Except, when Cocoa tried it, she got herself snared by a loose wire. "Baa!



Baa!" called Cocoa Puff. But no one heard her. So she kicked very hard and twisted her body this way and that until the wire finally snapped.

"Baa! Baa!" cried Cocoa Puff, with a gleeful jump. She ran off to join the other lambs. It didn't matter that the sharp wire was still tangled in her soft wool. After all, it was fun to be noticed and have everyone admire her bravery. The master would get her all fixed up at supper time.

"Cocoa Puff has been in trouble again," said the master's wife that evening. "This time she's got a limp." It was true. The wire had caught across her shoulder and it was beginning to hurt terribly. Cocoa Puff didn't say anything when the master pulled her close in his strong arms. His fingers found the wire and carefully began to untangle it from her wool. Then, with a leap, she was free again. Being a naughty black sheep wasn't so bad, was it?

It was on a stormy night that Cocoa Puff learned the truth. All week the sheep had been out in the far pasture. The lambs were all big enough to eat grass like the older sheep now, and the master only came out once a day for an evening visit. Cocoa Puff usually thought that was the best part of the day, for she loved special attention. The master would rub her round sides and scratch her behind the ears. Sometimes he would even let her lick salt off his fingers. But today Cocoa Puff had been more interested in finding a way out of the fence than enjoying the taste of salt.

She knew the master wouldn't like it. But why should she mind that? Cocoa Puff was so used to having her own way that she had begun to be quite sure that her own way was best. On that summer afternoon the gurgling road-side ditch seemed the best place of all. Cocoa was thirsty. The water bucket was way back at the gate and the black lamb was feeling lazy. She didn't want to walk across the hot meadow when there was plenty of cool fresh water right in front of her. The only problem



was that it was on the other side of a barbed wire fence

Cocoa Puff first tried lifting the lowest wire with her nose. The fence didn't budge. Next she tried shoving her head underneath. A sharp barb scratched her cheek and she gave up on that. There must be some way through! Cocoa Puff stomped her foot impatiently and managed to get one leg over the lowest wire. The gap in the fence was wider now and the lamb soon had her head and neck through. With a heave the black lamb was on the other side, and tumbling down the bank.

It was a thicket of blackberries at the edge of the ditch that caught her. She tried to pull herself free, but the sharp thorns stuck to her wool. The more she kicked and tugged, the more tangled she became. And thirsty. She couldn't even reach the water in the ditch.

Cocoa Puff began to feel frightened. "Baa!" she called. No one answered. All she could hear was the gurgling stream. Far off there was a rumble of thunder and the little lamb noticed how dark the sky had become. A storm was coming. Why had she been so determined to have her own way? Why had she not obeyed?

Then, far off, she heard the master's voice calling, "Come on sheep!" He must be leading them all up to the barn for shelter. Suddenly Cocoa Puff felt very lonely indeed. Would the master care that his black lamb was missing? She had caused him so much trouble that he was probably glad that she was gone!

A cold gust of wind shook the reeds and a few rain drops began to fall. Cocoa Puff's legs were scratched and bleeding. She was stiff and tired, and she couldn't even lay down. It was no fun at all to be a naughty sheep. Oh, how she wished that she could be safe in the master's arms again! But she had gone her own way and there was no hope now.

Then Cocoa Puff thought of something. Perhaps the master would come looking for her! It was getting colder and darker. "Baa! Baa!" she called. A dog howled back. Cocoa Puff had never liked being in the dark by herself, and she trembled. A big hungry dog might like to eat a little lamb that was on the outside of the fence. Would the master find her before it was too late? "Baa!" the black lamb called again.

"Cocoa Puff? Where are you?" Across the pasture she could hear the master calling!

She tried to call back, but the splashing rain seemed to drown out her voice. Oh, would he find her down there in the dark thicket? She called again.

The master's wife must be searching, too. "Did you hear something down by the ditch?" she asked.

"Baa!" Cocoa Puff called as loud as she could. Then she heard a wonderful shout. They had heard her!

"Yes, there she is!" Her master called joyfully to his wife. "Shine the light so I can get her out!" A flashlight beam shone over the fence and into the bramble patch where the black lamb lay. In a

moment the master was climbing over the fence. With his long shepherd's staff, he pulled Cocoa Puff gently out.

It felt so good to be wrapped warmly in his coat, going home. The master had wanted her enough to go looking for her in the dark and cold. How truly he must love her! And how much better it was to trust the master than to have her own way. Cocoa Puff lay her curly black head against his shoulder and sighed happily.



# No Mud Allowed

It is a rainy day and we've been doing chores outside. The ground is sticky with mud as we tromp along the path. Squish, squish. Are your feet cold? Let's go inside to get warm!

Wait a moment. You need to take off your shoes first. Mom doesn't want mud on the carpet, you know. No shoes inside. It's a house

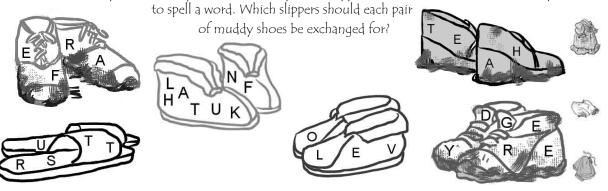
rule. *Do you have to take your shoes off every time?* you ask, as I help you untie your shoelaces. If we've been working or playing outside we do. It's not always easy, especially when the shoes are hard to get off. But I don't mind the rule. It helps the house stay much cleaner!

Our Father in Heaven has house rules, too. In His kingdom of love nothing that is evil or unclean is allowed. No hate or lies or selfishness. If you have anything wrong sticking to your life, you won't be allowed in. Does that sound like a strict rule? It is. God is a pure and holy God who keeps His house spotless. If you want to live with Him and have a place in His house, you will have to be clean, too. Nothing that defiles may enter in. (Rev. 21:27)

Think about it. Would you eat Grandma's pie if she put some spoiled fruit in it? You wouldn't say "a few moldy berries won't hurt." No! The fruit must be all good to make a good pie. Or what if Dad built a tree house with rusty nails and rotten boards for the floor? It wouldn't even be safe to stand on, would it? We must use all good materials if we want the results to be good. Only goodness is allowed into heaven.

You had better take off those muddy socks, too. We'll have to wash them. But my feet are cold. Don't worry! Here are some slippers you can wear. They are just my size! Can these be mine? Yes, as long as you stay with us they can. And that is the way it is in God's house, too. He won't allow any mud inside, but He has warm slippers of love and trust for you to wear instead.

Below are three pairs of muddy shoes and three pairs of slippers. Unscramble the letters in each pair to spell a word. Which slippers should each pair



### MARK'S SCARE

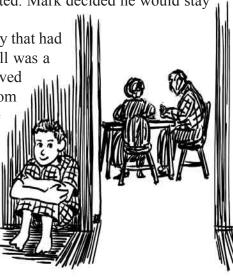
Another true story about Gramps as a boy -

Mark thought that he was really, really smart. His Mother and Daddy were always telling him things to do, but he thought he was so smart that he knew better. "Disobedience can cost you your life," his Mother told him. She knew that his disobedience was going to get him into trouble. It always does.

In the summertime, Mark hated to go to bed at the end of the day. But Mother would have him put on pajamas and get into his bed while it was still light! It was unfair, Mark thought. Mother and Daddy didn't have to go to bed. Usually, they sat in the kitchen around the table, talking and staying up as late as they wanted. Mark decided he would stay up, too.

Mark's bedroom was next to a small dark hallway that had a noisy attic fan in the ceiling. At the end of the hall was a door that opened to the dining room. If Mark moved very quietly, he could sneak through the dining room and sit down by the doorway to the kitchen. Then he could hear everything that Mother and Daddy said. It was the greatest fun to be out of bed and not have anyone know.

That is, it was fun until Mother suddenly decided to check on Mark. She would get up suddenly, and appear in the doorway, and he would be caught *disobeying*. "Back to bed this instant!" she would say.



But Mark didn't mind. Next time he would be more

careful so he wouldn't get caught. He did not want to obey in his heart. He thought that he knew best.

One summer night, Mother had caught him twice. She warned him, "You had better stay in bed this time, young man! If you don't, something bad is going to happen to you."

This went right in one of Mark's freshly-washed pink ears and out the other. What could happen that was so bad? He would just be sent to bed again if he was caught. He would be more careful than ever.

He was. He eased himself out of bed so very, very carefully that the springs did not squeak even once. He slipped across the wooden floor, and crept into the dark hallway where the attic fan roared. He could see the light streaming from the kitchen door. He started down the hallway, *and suddenly the wall came alive!* It turned into a great black shape that lunged at him and hollered "Boo!"

It was the worst scare he had ever had. It was worse than the time that he had sucked the canary into the vacuum cleaner. It was worse than the time that his little brother had gotten

lost in the store. He almost went to the bathroom in his pajamas. Tears filled his eyes and he shook all over.

It wasn't the wall, after all. It was Mother. She had hid there and patiently waited for him to disobey. She knew he would. She caught him and took him back to bed. She told him some more about the dangers of disobedience. I think some of it got through to him that time.

Think Deeper . The Price of Disobedience

There is somebody else who is waiting for you to dis-

obey, too. He hates you and wants to drag your soul to hell. He has a lot of servants who are waiting for you, too. Some of these are people who will tempt you to do things that you know are wrong. Others want to trap you and get you into crime and drugs and lots of other trouble.

But you probably think you are really smart, just like Mark thought. Hell is full of smart people, who disobeyed. Will you **miss out** on all the blessings of heaven just to have your own way? What a terrible price to pay!

Look at the list below. These are the sad endings of some people mentioned in the Bible. Can you guess who they were? The first letter of their name is given. On the right of each name you can read a special blessing each could have had. What did they do to lose it?

#### Price for Disobedience Name

Fell down dead (Acts 5:5) A \_\_\_\_\_

Killed himself (1 Sam. 31:4) S\_\_\_\_\_

Killed his brother (Gen. 4:10) C\_\_\_\_\_

Hung himself (Mat. 27:5) J\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Blessing Lost**

God's supply for all his needs A kingdom protected by God God's favor and blessing Being a disciple of Jesus

The Bible tells us that "the wages of sin is death." Sin is choosing to disobey and rebel against God. God is the giver of life and happiness. If we turn from Him and go our own way, we are choosing death and misery. Ever since Adam and Eve, people have been choosing the way of death. But God so loves us, that He made a way to rescue us from the terrible price of disobedience. Jesus came to **take away our sins**, and give us eternal life.

Today you have a choice of life or death. Because of our sins, we were all heading for eternal death in hell. God sent Jesus to bring us back to life by taking the disobedience out of us, if we will turn from our sins and seek His forgiveness. Are you truly sorry for disobeing? Do you want a new heart of obedience? Jesus can do that for you. He did it for me.

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## I Am Loved

sat on the front steps of her new home and looked around. "This is our yard, Leanne," she told her doll. "But we have to share it with the other people in the apartments. There really isn't anything to do outside. I wish I could take you for a ride in the stroller, but we couldn't bring it."

A dark-haired girl came around the corner. Jessica stopped talking. The girl smiled. "Hi, my name is Tammy. Do you live here?" Jessica nodded. "Well, what's your name?" asked Tammy.

"Jessica," Jessica replied. "Where do you live?"

"Upstairs," Tammy said, pointing to a second floor apartment. "I saw you move in yesterday. Do you live with your dad and mom? Do you have any brothers and sisters?"

Jessica smiled. "Yep. I live with my mommy and daddy. I used to have a foster brother and sister, but I don't have any broth-

ers or sisters now."

"Why?" asked Tammy. She plopped down on the step beside Jessica.

"They couldn't come with us. They went to live with their grandma and grandpa. But I got adopted."

"Oh," said Tammy. "I used to live with my grandma. But I

like living with my mom better,

even though she yells at me a lot. Don't you miss your mom?"

"I don't see my birth mom anymore, and that makes me sad sometimes," Jessica said slowly. "But now I've got a daddy, and he's really nice."

"Well, I'm getting a dad, too. My mom's get-

ting married soon," Tammy said.

"Did you pray for a daddy?" Jessica asked.

Tammy didn't seem to hear. "Me and my sissy are going to be the flower girls and wear pretty pink dresses," she was saying. "I can't wait!"

"I wore a green dress when Mommy Jane got married to Mr. Isaac," Jessica said. "Then we moved here."

"Are you poor?" Tammy asked.

"No," Jessica said, surprised. "I used to live in a really big house."

"Well, I thought you must be poor because you moved here. When my old dad kicked us out we moved here. If you aren't poor, why are you wearing such an old dress?"

Jessica looked down at her denim jumper. "This is my play jumper. It's not old."

"Well, it doesn't look so good. When my mom gets married we're going to be rich and

live in a big house with a yard. I'm going to have lots of new clothes and toys! Do you have any Bratz dolls?"

"No, I'm not allowed to," Jessica said. "But I like them."

> "Why won't your mom let you have them?" Tammy demanded. "My mom gives me everything I want."

> "My mom bought me this doll for my birthday,"

Jessica said, holding Leanne tightly. "I like her."

"Yeah, but she's just a baby doll. You don't have any grown up dolls, do you?"

Jessica shook her head.

"Too bad," Tammy said. "Maybe you can come and play with mine."

"I can't go to other people's houses," Jessica said

"No fun!" Tammy said. "Well, I want to go watch my favorite show, so bye!"

Jessica hugged her doll tightly and watched the brown-haired girl disappear around the corner. "No fun," she repeated to herself. Slowly she got up and went inside.

"Hi, Sugar," Mommy said, looking up from the box she was unpacking. "Have fun outside?"

Jessica shrugged. She didn't feel like talking.

"Who was that girl you were talking with?" Mommy asked with a smile. "She seemed about your age."

"Her name's

Tammy," Jessica said, and disappeared into her bedroom. Boxes were everywhere. One held a farm set. Another was full of Leanne's clothes. Jessica dumped it out and looked at the pile. "Baby clothes are boring," she muttered to herself. Maybe another box had some more interesting toys.

"What are you doing, Jessica?" Mommy asked from the doorway. She didn't sound happy. "You're going to have to clean up this mess before dinner."

Jessica looked around at the scattered toys and frowned. "I don't want to," she said stubbornly. She had promised Daddy that she wouldn't throw a fit, but the angry thoughts just came tumbling out.

"These are just baby toys and I don't want to clean them up!" Jessica stomped her foot and felt something crunch underneath it. In dismay, she saw that she had stepped on her favorite toy horse. One of its prancing feet was broken right off!

"Oh, Jessica," Mommy said very softly. "Who said they were baby toys? Did Tammy tell you that?"

Jessica hung her head.

"Do you really think your toys are for babies?"

Jessica looked up at Mommy's kind face and slowly shook her head. "I'm sorry, Mommy," she whispered.

"Sorry for breaking your horse or sorry for being self willed?" asked Mommy. She lifted Jessican's chin and looked into her eyes. "I love you, Sugar, but I need you to obey."

"Yes, Mommy," whispered Jessica. She picked up the broken toy from the floor. "Can we fix my horse?"

"Maybe Daddy can," Mommy said, setting

the pieces on the dresser. "But first you need to clean up your room." She looked around at the jumbled toys and added, "Why don't you tell me about

Tammy while I help you find a place for all your things?"

"Okay," said Jessica.

As they began arranging the toy barn and farm animals on a shelf, Jessica told Mommy about the girl upstairs. She told how Tammy thought they were poor, and about Tammy moving to a big house when her mom got married. As Jessica tucked Leanne's baby clothes into one of her dresser drawers she asked about Tammy's Bratz dolls.

"I wish I had some grown-up dolls," she said.

"You know why we won't let you have them," Mommy reminded her.

"Because they have bad attitudes and aren't modest," Jessica said, looking down.

"We love you too much to give you toys that will hurt you," said Mommy. "I know that's hard to understand right now. Many things other children have will seem fun and exciting to you. The reason we don't let you have them isn't because we don't care. It's because we really do," Mommy said. She helped Jessica stack her pony memory cards in their box.

"It is the same way with God," she contin-



ued. "He always does what is best for us, and He wants us to trust Him. But most people think God doesn't really care, that He is just trying to keep them from having fun."

Jessica set her stuffed animals on the bed and picked up Leanne. Mommy sat down beside her.

"Remember the Bible verses Daddy read us last night? How that people despised and rejected Jesus, even when He had come to save them?" Mommy asked.

Slowly Jessica nodded. "They even killed Him," she said.

"Yes, and said that if God really was His Father, Jesus should come down from the cross," said Mommy. "Sort of like how Tammy said that we didn't care about you. But Jesus knew that His Father loved him, and he prayed for those that made fun of Him. Don't you think we should pray for Tammy?"

Jessica nodded. "She said that her old daddy kicked them out of their house."

"That is sad," said Mommy. "Tammy doesn't know what a loving home is. Even if she does move to a big house, do you think it is going to make her really happy?" Jessica shook her head. "I don't think she knows about God like we do."

"Aren't you glad we can trust God to give us what is best?" Mommy asked with a smile. "Remember how you used to beg for a daddy? And how I told you we must pray and wait for God to give you the right one?"

Jessica hugged Leanne and smiled happily. "And God answered my prayers!" she said. Maybe Tammy had all the toys she wanted, but Jessica knew that she had parents that loved her. "Won't Daddy be glad that my room is clean?" she said, slipping her little hand into Mommy's big one.

"Yes, I know he will," Mommy said. "Let's get dinner on so it will be ready when he gets home!"





Today the wet, cold rain is coming down. I have to sweep the floor, and I wish I could curl up with a book and read. My sister has a cough, my back has a pain. Life is full of troubles, isn't it? But I'm



I'm thankful because I have a roof over my head. Some people don't, you know.And electric lights to make the rooms bright on dark days.And I'm so glad I'm not sick! It is funny how one little pain likes to get all our attention. Most children like to tell me all about their owies and how sick they are. Have you ever tried counting how much of your body is feeling just fine? Let's see - my toes wiggle, feet are strong, legs work well, my stomach doesn't ache... neither does my neck or head, nor my eyes and ears. My, I am actually guite strong and healthy, even if my back hurts a little! And, really, I can be glad about the sweeping, because I do like to see the floor all clean. Chores aren't hard if you get right to them and work with a smile!

Sometimes it is easy to be like Complaining Carl (in the cover story), and look at the dark side of life. But it doesn't make us happy. Which boy would you rather be – Carl or Gary? I'm sure I can guess your answer. It's easy to tell that when you look at his smile! So what is the secret to his happiness?

Thankfulness isn't a feeling; it's a choice you make each day. If I asked you, "Is God good to you?" I know you would say, "yes!" But do you **act** like God is good to you each day? Do you welcome each morning with a glad smile – even if you have work to do, or you can't play outside because of the cold and rain? I think it is a good habit to change each complaining thought into a praise. Instead of saying, "rain again," try counting the ways the rain is a blessing to you. How would the trees and flowers grow without it? What about the food you eat?

The Bible tells us that "there shall be showers of blessing." (Ezekiel 34:26) There are thousands of water drops in a rain shower, aren't there? More than I can count. And that's how many good things the Lord is doing for us all the time. Just stop a moment to count a few! Yes, God is good. When we are thankful and think about His good care of us, we won't be afraid to trust Him in days of trouble. We will know that He is able to work all things together for our good, even when it doesn't seem like it!

Today the sunshine has peaked out through the rain clouds. I really don't have much work to do, and I'm glad I have strength to do it. I have a loving family and a warm home. God has been so good to me! I'm thankful today. Are you?

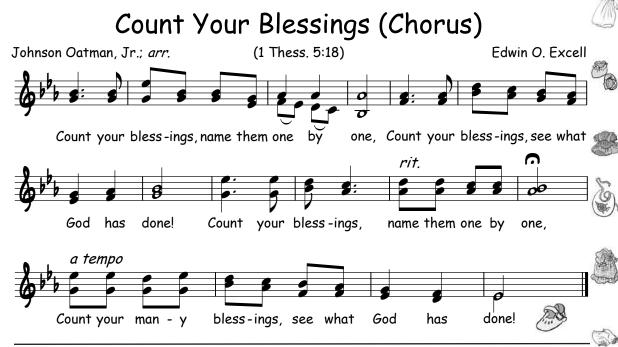
### "Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." (Jer. 33:11)

Are YOU thankful for something? Share it with us!

I'm thankful that Jesus answered my prayers and gave me a Dad. - AutumnGrace, age 6

I'm thankful for my sissy and I love her. - Cindy, age 4

I'm thankful for the sunshine and the rain. - Katie, age 9 I'm thankful for my doll. - Chloe, age 3



For a fun travel song, here are more ways to "count your blessings" (feel free to add your own!) -

"name them two by two ... see what God can do!" "three by three... see what God has done for me!" "four by four... count them more and more!"

"five by five... see that God is alive!" "six by six... see what God can fix! "seven by seven... count them all the way to heaven!"



Dear Reader,

Many choices are before us each day Choices to resist instruction or to submit, choices of our attitude and wills. The Lord has made a way for us to be happy and safe. It is the way of trusting and obeying Him. But it is our choice to receive or reject His love to us. **Please consider the cost!** We would be glad to hear from any of you. For older ones who want to be challenged and encouraged in Christian living, *Foundation Truth* is published for youths and adults. Back issues and other literature are available at

Himelesstruths.org.

We are a God-fearing family that includes Rick and Krista Erickson, Laura (27), Kara (22), and Amanda (14). The publishing of *Treasures of the Kingdom* is mainly done by Laura and Amanda, with help (guidance, proofreading, and contributions) from others.

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In the King's service, The Editors

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