



Michelle's Mission

By Brian Combs

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Text by Jeanette Poteet, Holly Yount and Brian Combs.

Cover-art by Brian Combs with assistance from MidJourney.

Illustrations by Viviana Moyano.

Games and Activities by Sophia Poteet.

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Chapter 1: A Mission from God

“I think it’s dead.”

Hearing those words eight-year-old Michelle looked up at her sister Rosie. At ten, Rosie was Michelle’s main source of information. Oh, Mom and Dad knew stuff, but Rosie knew about the stuff most important to Michelle. Right now, that was this raccoon.

Michelle poked at the raccoon gently with a stick. It didn’t move. The dead pine needles on the ground rustled some though, startling the girls a little until they realized what made the noise.

The girls were halfway through their summer break from school and here on their East Texas homestead, there was no longer a “cool early morning”. It was just hot. From early morning to late. Hot. The girls had gotten out as early as they could after breakfast and chores trying to beat that heat, but both kids’ faces showed dirt had stuck to their sweaty foreheads.

It was worth it though. They’d rather be outside in the dirt and heat than inside any day. Even so, both girls had been imagining a cold glass of water for a while already; they were ready to be done. At least until Michelle had stumbled across this find.

“I think you’re right.” she responded. She looked up at her older sister Rosie. “What do you think we should do?”

“Do?” Rosie exclaimed, “Nothing! I’m for sure not touching it.”

“But we ought to bury it, shouldn’t we?” Michelle persisted.

“I’m NOT touching it.” Rosie repeated. “Let’s just go.” Seeing Michelle hesitate, Rosie put action to her words and



stood up, dusting the pine needles and dirt off her pants, and started walking towards home hoping Michelle would follow. Sure enough, with a concerned look backwards, Michelle followed.

“What was that?” Michelle asked, pausing as they walked.

“I’m not sure”, Rosie replied, “it sounded like someone called out ‘Candy’!”

“Mom and Dad definitely wouldn’t be giving us candy this early in the morning.”

Rosie smiled, for that was true. “It sounded farther away anyways,” she resolved “I guess we’ll never know”.

Once home, Rosie headed to find her book. She’d already read the book three times, but regularly she’d pick it up to re-read her favorite parts.

Michelle, however, wandered into the kitchen. Mom was there rolling out dough for a pie. Mom’s hair was down. Mom’s pretty hair was so long it reached her waist. Michelle liked it when Mom’s hair was down. She loved Mom’s hair and hoped

that her own would grow that long one day.

"Hey Mom,"

"Hey sweetie," Mom responded with a smile. "Y'all find anything interesting in your exploring?"

"Sort of," Michelle said, wondering how Mom would respond to their find. Michelle washed her hands, then took some paper towels, ran them under the water then wiped her face off. The cool water was a welcome relief. With her face and hands now clean she fixed herself a glass of ice water. She turned to see Mom just watching her.

"What?" Michelle asked.

"Well, what sort of interesting thing did you find?" Mom asked curiously.

"Oh, well, um, a raccoon." Michelle answered. Mom looked surprised. "A dead one." Michelle hurried to reassure her. The last thing she needed was Mom worrying the woods were too dangerous for them to explore out there.

Mom couldn't hide the fact that she found the thought of finding the raccoon

“icky”. She looked and saw Mom making a face. Michelle giggled at her.

“Don’t you laugh at me young lady!” Mom said sternly, but Michelle knew she was just teasing her.

“You didn’t touch it did you?” Mom asked.

“No,” Michelle answered, “I poked it a little with a stick, just to make sure it was dead, but that’s it.” Michelle took a chair at the table and ran her fingers along the embroidered flowers on the tablecloth. The kitchen still smelled like cinnamon and something sweet from this morning’s breakfast of apple cinnamon oatmeal.

Mom rolled her eyes, “And what would you have done if it had hopped up and proved itself alive?”

“I, um, I don’t know. I didn’t really think of that.” Michelle realized as she answered that this probably wasn’t a smart answer. She sat at the table staring out the window for a bit, lost in thought. She idly noticed a praying mantis outside moving around the top corner of the window. Further out the window she could see two

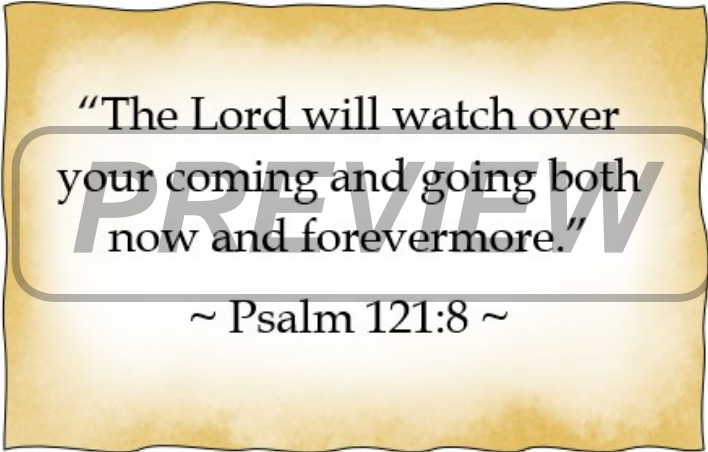
of the older kittens rolling around play-fighting with each other.

“Mom?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you remember the Promise Box verse we did this morning?” Each day, usually after breakfast, the family read a verse from their Promise Box. It was almost like magic how the verses seemed to have something to do with their lives or something with which they were struggling.

This morning's verse had stuck with her, mostly because she couldn't see how it applied to anything about them at all. It had read:



“The Lord will watch over
your coming and going both
now and forevermore.”

~ Psalm 121:8 ~

The verse just seemed bland. What did that mean for them? It made God sound more like a spy than the God she learned about in Sunday School each week.

"I do remember it," Mom responded. "And I was extra glad to have that promise today. It made me feel better."

"It did? How?" Michelle was surprised.

"Well, you girls are always out there doing exactly as you did this morning. It's reassuring to me to know that the Lord is watching over you girls as you're out there exploring."

"Hmm. I guess He doesn't watch over raccoons?" Michelle suggested sadly.

Mom just smiled, "If you look at Adam and Eve, when God made the garden of Eden and all the animals, it sounds like God made US to watch over the animals, while He watches over us."

"Hmm" Michelle said again. She then quickly hopped up from the table and moved to put her glass in the sink. "Thanks Mom. That helps. I know what I'm going to do now." Michelle was out the door and

already down the road before the screen door landed it's "THWACK!"

Standing near the door Mom could hear a muffled "Sorry!" in the distance. "Those girls!" She just shook her head and went back to her pie.

Chapter 2: Trapped!

Talking with Mom had given Michelle just the encouragement she needed to do what she'd wanted to do earlier. She needed to take care of that raccoon. This was her land. These were her animals.

She headed to the barn and grabbed one of Dad's shovels then headed back into the woods towards where they'd found the raccoon. She didn't remember exactly where it was, but figured she could get close enough to the area that she'd be able to find it. A determined set to her face, she headed off.

45 minutes later she was starting to feel crazy. She hadn't been able to find the raccoon at all. She'd found a dead bird that she was pretty sure was a meadowlark with its' light and dark brown back and yellow chest.

She had stopped and buried the bird and even took a moment to sing what she could remember of "Amazing Grace" over the grave, like she'd seen at a funeral last year. She snagged a pinecone and a flower and put it in the grave before carefully refilling the burial site with dirt.

Burying the bird made her feel good about her new idea to take care of the animals now that they were all living in "her" forest. But for all her wandering and looking, she had found no dead raccoon.

There was a thought niggling in the back of her head that perhaps some bigger animal had come and "taken" it. Michelle tried not to think about that, and that perhaps there was a bigger animal around her that she should be afraid of. This was her woods; she wouldn't be afraid of it.

She imagined being like Snow White, and birds flitting onto her fingers while she sang, or deer coming through the trees to see her. How cool would it be if rabbits and badgers and such would come up to her and be friends. Nevertheless, she kept the shovel firmly in her hand, just in case something more than the friendly fairy-tale animals was out there.

As sweat trickled down her neck she stopped imagining animals and started imagining that ice cold slushy Mom had made them once, with raspberries and crushed ice. It had been so freezing cold in her mouth that she'd almost immediately gotten an ice cream headache. Walking endlessly in this heat, it seemed impossible to have your head be that cold.

As she walked in and out of the trees one minute she was in the sunshine and the next minute she could feel the cool shade on her cheeks.

She heard leaves rustle just up ahead and noticed a squirrel.

"You're a smarty, aren't you?" Michelle called to the animal. "You know

where it's coolest to play instead of out in the sunshine."

The squirrel chattered at her, flicked its bushy tail, and scampered off as Michelle approached.

Another cluster of leaves rustled to Michelle's right. It wasn't the squirrel because she saw him run up the side of one of the tall pine trees. Michelle stopped in her tracks and listened.

Swoosh!

Again, the underbrush swayed as something moved around.

Michelle stepped lightly in the direction of the noise. She held her breath and peered into the dim light. Her patience was rewarded when a large rabbit burst into the clearing right in front of Michelle.

Michelle let out a gasp at the sudden movement. The animal hopped a few feet, stopped, twitched its nose, and hopped a little farther. Michelle's eyes lit up as she recognized the fluffy rabbit. Then, a second or two later, a smaller rabbit bound out of the taller weeds and followed the larger one.



“Oh, wow!” Michelle said. She quickly jogged behind the two rabbits, curious about where they were headed.

Michelle leaped over a large rock and some briars in pursuit of the two creatures. They were much quicker, but Michelle kept her eyes locked on the long ears and the round fluffy cotton-white tails. They dashed in and out of trees and underbrush so fast it was obvious they knew the landscape well.

Michelle couldn't see them anymore. She quietly dropped to her knees and studied the area around her, listening. After a minute or two she stood up and looked around. The rabbits were long gone.

She dusted off the knees of her jeans, glad that she'd worn them today instead of her play dress. She sighed. She didn't think she would catch the rabbits, but it sure would have been fun to see them closer.

And there was the small matter of the fact that none of this led her to the raccoon. She wondered if she'd have to just give up on this and assume another animal took it.

She leaned against a rough barked pine tree for a minute thinking. She tried to

remember what was nearby when they had found the raccoon. It seemed like she was further away from the house than they had been before. Maybe she'd gone too far. She straightened up, rubbing a sore spot on her bare arm where the bark had left a red indentation. "I've gone too far I think," she said to the trees around her. She'd not go any further from the house but would check a ways off to either side of her before she had to just assume the raccoon was completely gone.

Three steps from the tree, she shrieked as the world dropped out from under her.