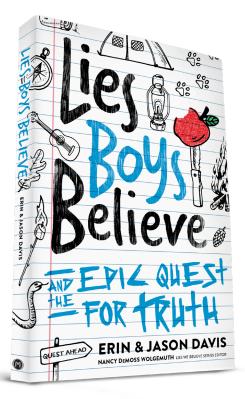
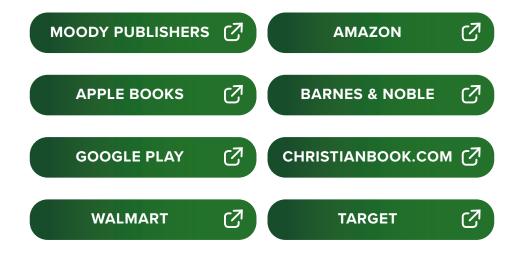


BOOK EXCERPT



Graphic novel meets meaty Bible teaching, helping boys identify ten core lies and replace them with Truth so they can stand firm. Your son will learn to swim against tides of deception and be equipped to recognize future lies as he develops a passion for knowing and living God's Word.

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Ň "Reading the Bible just isn't for me." しに #1: TRUTH: The Bible is your treasure <11 Inted Material



Note: This chapter is a little longer than the others, but don't let that spook you. It's interactive! Have you ever imagined what it's like to go inside a dark mine? Or solved a cryptogram? Grab your favorite snack and settle in. You're about to join the adventure!

• • •

"Wake up, sleepyhead," Dad said, as he gently kicked the bottom of Lenny's foot.

Lenny hadn't moved a muscle all morning.

The sun was already rising, and everything was beginning to bake in the sizzling summer heat. Dad and Thomas had already cooked scrambled eggs over the fire, before rinsing out their dishes and loading most of their supplies back into the van.

Thomas had always been an early riser. Lenny . . . not so much.

The Bible LIR.

Lenny groaned and rolled over. His blond hair was already starting to stick to his sweaty forehead. "Five more minutes!" he mumbled from inside that hazy state between wakefulness and sleep. He heard the sounds of his dad and brother around him but kept drifting back into his dreams.

> "We've got to get moving, bud," Dad replied. "Help us pack up the tent. Adventure awaits!"

> The boys had a lot of practice working together. Lenny usually took the lead. His parents and teachers often told him that he was a good leader. He just seemed to know how to get the job done. Taking the tent down and breaking down the long tent poles was the easy part. Getting everything back into the nylon tent bag required teamwork, but with some patience and creativity, the boys managed to do it without Dad's help. Before long they were back in the van with miles of open road ahead of them.

When lunchtime hit, the travelers devoured greasy cheeseburgers and thick chocolate milkshakes from a diner in the first town they came to. Dad insisted that they eat in the car instead of going in. "We have to be somewhere before sundown," he said mysteriously.

Late in the afternoon, they pulled down a long, dusty driveway that led to a small log cabin. Brown chickens pecked the ground in the front yard. On the big front porch of the cabin,



a man with a long white beard and faded overalls tilted back and forth on a wooden rocker. Next to him, an old red dog was snoozing in the summer heat.

"Who's that?" Thomas whispered.

"That's Pastor Ralph," Dad replied.

Ralph had led the church Dad attended growing up. Through the years, the boys had heard stories about the pastor who had encouraged Dad to read the Bible every day. It was something he had done since he was just eight years old.

"You didn't tell us your pastor was so . . . old," Lenny said.

"Or that he lived with so many chickens!" Thomas added.

Dad laughed. "Well, he wasn't old when he was my pastor," he said. "We've both changed a lot since then. After Pastor Ralph retired and his wife died, he moved here to be closer to his grandkids.

"Building his own cabin had always been a dream of his. He built this whole place with his own two hands," Dad added proudly.

"Cool!" Thomas said, as he began studying the cabin's architecture. He loved to look at blueprints and think about how things are built. He often built cabins and lean-tos with sticks and branches in the yard, and he and his brothers would pretend they were pioneers or gold miners or sailors marooned on a deserted island. He knew enough about building to recognize that Pastor Ralph's cabin was built by a true craftsman.

Dad pulled the van under the shade of a big elm tree. Everyone climbed out and stretched and yawned. The long hours in the car without much to look at had made them sleepy.

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"Welcome, adventurers!" Pastor Ralph boomed. He walked slowly down the porch steps, his dog matching his stride. As he reached the van, he threw out his hand for a shake. He shook each boy's hand enthusiastically before giving their dad a big bear hug. "I remember when you were their size," he said.

"That seems like a long time ago," Dad said.

"How's that wife of yours?" Ralph asked.

"As beautiful, kind, and smart as ever," Dad said, beaming.

Dad was always saying mushy stuff like that about Mom. Though the boys often rolled their eyes and sometimes pretended like they were gagging over the things their parents said about each other, secretly, they liked it.

"Are you hungry?" Ralph asked.

Even though they'd each gulped down a double cheeseburger, fries, and a shake for lunch, both boys yelled "Yes!" at the exact same time.

"Pinch, poke, you owe me a coke," Thomas said a split second before his brother did.

Dad put his arm around Ralph. "Growing boys are *always* hungry."

un sing and "Cookies and milk are waiting for you on the table," Pastor Ralph announced. "But eat them quickly. You've got a puzzle to solve."

> A puzzle? Thomas imagined a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Lenny was picturing a crossword. But they didn't stop to ask questions. Those cookies were calling their names.

> Inside the cabin, each boy stuffed a cookie in his mouth and gulped down a tall glass of cold milk.

"These boys act like they haven't eaten in weeks," Ralph teased. "Grab those lanterns," he added, nodding toward the corner of the kitchen.

Two old-fashioned oil lanterns sat on the floor. The metal looked like it had been painted red at some point, but the color had faded to a pinkish orange. Small patches of rust dotted each one. The glass domes were streaked with black soot from years of use. They matched the look of Pastor Ralph's cabin perfectly: functional but not exactly stylish. Everything that hung on the log walls looked like it was from another era, including deer antlers, old snow shoes, and faded pictures of Pastor Ralph's family.

Each boy grabbed a lantern and followed Pastor Ralph out the back door. His yard was littered with old items that most would consider junk. Wooden wheels, rusty farm equipment, and trucks and mowers in various states of repair rose from

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the crabgrass in every direction. Several projects, obviously assembled from spare parts, included a homemade wind chime dangling from a tree and rusty hubcaps shaped into a sculpture on the shed wall.

Lenny was itching to dig through the piles to see what he could find, but he stuck with the group.

Pastor Ralph led them to a dark opening in the side of the hill that gaped like the mouth of a monster.

"This is an old mine," Dad explained. "Long before Pastor Ralph bought this land, men used to go in through this opening every day and come out with carts of coal."

"Cool!" Lenny exclaimed.

"Creepy," Thomas said more quietly.

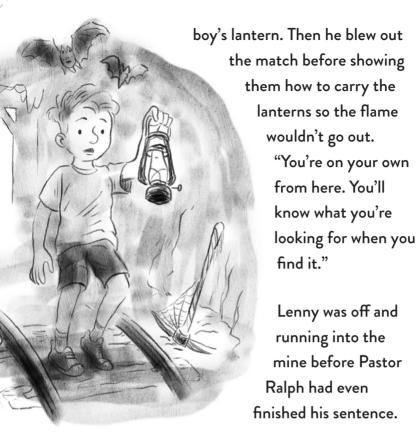
"You're going in . . . without us," Dad announced. "But you're not looking for coal. You're looking for *treasure*."

Their eyes got wide with excitement.

"In fact," Dad continued, "you're looking for one of the greatest treasures a person can ever find."

Pastor Ralph pulled a box of matches from the front pocket of his overalls. He struck one on the rock opening and lit each

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Thomas hung back, feeling a little unsure. "Is it safe, Dad?"

"Well, all treasure hunts have some risk, I suppose," Dad replied, putting his hands on Thomas's shoulders. "But stick with your brother. You have your lamp, and Pastor Ralph and I will stay right here. If you get scared, just come back toward the light."

Hesitantly at first, Thomas followed his brother into the mine. "Lenny, wait up!" His words seemed to bounce off the walls.

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"Lenny!"
"Lenny . . . "
"Lenny . . . "
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"Wait up!" "Wait up . . . " "Wait up . . . "

The tunnel was filled with old wood mining carts and some broken tools. They heard the sound of wings flapping overhead before they saw the silhouettes of bats diving back and forth between the shaft walls. The air smelled musty, like the patch of dirt under their front porch where they would sometimes dig for fishing worms after it rained. The underground world was mostly quiet . . . and dark. Soon, the boys couldn't see much beyond what was in the small circles of light provided by their lanterns. The light coming from the mine opening behind them was growing dimmer when Thomas suddenly bumped into something.

"Ouch!" he said. "What was that?"

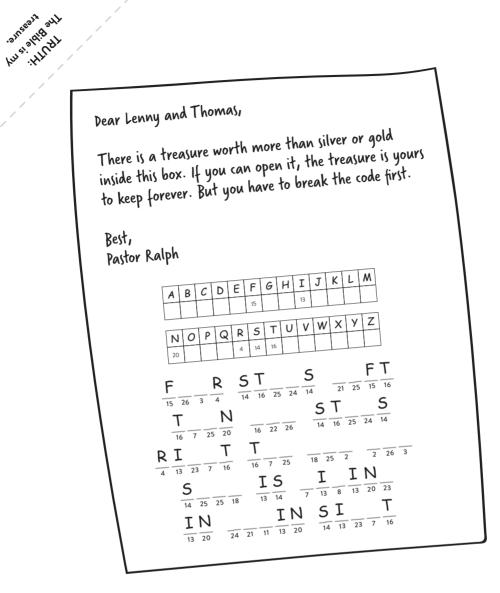
Both boys held their lanterns above their heads, expanding the ring of light.

"It's a table," Thomas said. "Looks like there's a note."

Sitting on a small table was an old wooden box. On top of the box was a note from Pastor Ralph.

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The Bile LIR.



Underneath Pastor Ralph's signature, there were a bunch of letters and numbers that didn't make any sense.

"What could the treasure be?" Thomas asked.

"What's worth more than silver or gold?" Lenny wondered out loud.

"A million dollars!" Thomas said.

"Or a key to a new sports car," Lenny responded. "Let's find out!"

The Bile LIR.

Thomas set the note on the table, picked up the box, and felt along the edges. It was sealed shut. He tried to use his lantern to see the box in detail, but it was tough to hold the box and his lantern, so he set it down on the cool dirt floor.

"I can't see!" Thomas said to his brother. "Hold your lantern closer."

"On it!" Lenny said as he held his lantern right in front of the box. "There's a lock!" he exclaimed.

On the front of the box, a brass plate surrounding a small keyhole gleamed in the lantern light. But where was the key?

Thomas set the box back on top of the table. Lenny held his lantern high as his brother felt around and under the table. No key. Lenny dropped the lantern lower as his brother got down on his hands and knees and felt the ground. Nothing. Thomas picked up the note again. "This must be the puzzle Pastor Ralph was talking about," he reasoned.

Lenny could almost see an imaginary light bulb turn on above his head.

پین^{۳:}.بلی^{۲۲} "I know what those letters mean!" Thomas blurted. "It's a cryptogram."

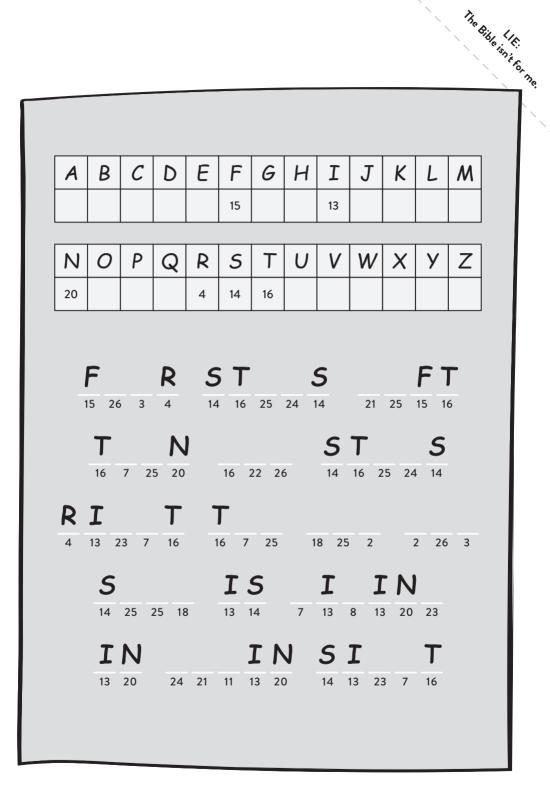
"A cryptowhat?" Lenny asked.

"A cryptogram. I love these. It's like a word puzzle."

The boys hunched over the table, shoulder to shoulder, as they studied Pastor Ralph's note more closely.

Tag, You're It! En

Try to solve the cryptogram on the next page. It's the same one Lenny and Thomas discovered in the mine. Each letter has a corresponding number. We've given you a few letters to get you started. For example, F = 15. Think about words and patterns you know, like how an "in" at the end of the word is usually followed by a "g," as in fishing. Once you figure out the letter in one spot, fill it in for all the spots with the same number.



Lenny looked at the puzzle for less than a minute. "This is impossible!" he shouted.

"Just give me a minute," Thomas whispered. "I can do this."

In the dim light, Lenny watched as a serious expression moved across his brother's face. He'd seen that look before. Thomas had a knack for figuring out riddles and math problems that others couldn't.

"Start with the short words . . . look for patterns," Thomas said, though Lenny could tell his brother was mostly talking to himself. Seconds later he shouted, "I've got the first word!" His voice echoed from the mine walls. "It's four!"

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"Four what?" Lenny asked.
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"I don't know yet," his brother said.

Thomas picked his lantern up off the mine floor and placed it on the table. The seconds ticked away while he worked on the puzzle.

Lenny explored the mine as he waited, but he didn't venture too far from his brother. He wanted his share of the treasure too. (Plus, he was a little more scared than he let on.) As he wandered along the shaft walls, he stubbed his toe on something sticking up from the dirt. "Ouch!" Lenny yelled before reaching down to see what he'd hit. It was an old pickax, probably left behind by a miner after a long day of work. He picked it up and examined the metal head, rusted by time. Lenny headed back toward his brother, who was still hunched over the table with a look of concentration on his face. Just as Lenny was about to suggest they could pry the box open with the pickax, Thomas exclaimed, "I've got it!"

"Well . . . what does it say?"

A	В	С	D	Е	F	G	Н	Ι	J	Κ	L	М
11	17	6	8	25	15	23	7	13	9	18	21	5
N	0	Р	Q	R	5	Т	U	V	W	X	У	Ζ

FOUR STEPS LEFT 16 25 24 14 14 25 15 26 3 4 21 15 16 TWO STEPS THE Ν 14 16 25 25 16 22 26 24 7 20 16 14 R THF Τ ΚF G У 16 7 25 23 18 25 4 13 7 16 2 2 26 3 SEEK IS HIDING 25 25 18 13 14 7 13 8 13 20 23 14 S Τ ΤN A TN G Т Р 13 20 24 21 11 13 20 14 13 23 7 16

بین^{ور}: برایات "Four steps left, then two steps right," Thomas read. "The key you seek is hiding in plain sight."

> "I'm sure glad we brought your big brain on this trip," Lenny said, giving his brother a high five. "Let me see."

Lanterns in hand, they turned away from the box so they were facing the mine wall on the left. They took four steps.

"Then two steps right," Thomas repeated, and they both stepped right.

"Yikes! A bat hit me," Lenny yelled, wiping his forehead after running into something cold and solid.

"What did it feel like?" Thomas asked.

"Like I got hit with something metal."

Immediately they both held their lanterns above their heads. Thomas saw it first. Lenny was busy swatting at whatever he imagined had attacked him.

"That's not a bat!" Thomas said. "It's a key!!"

Sure enough, dangling from a long string attached to the mine ceiling was a small brass key. How had they missed it before? In a space filled with items from the past, the bright shiny key looked obviously out of place. A few bats hung from the ceiling near the string where the key was attached.

"You found it!" Lenny said before high-fiving his brother again.

Thomas had a collection of old keys in a big glass jar back home. This looked like one of his skeleton keys. It was made of heavy brass. On the top was an ornate design of swirls and loops, attached to a shaft that was about two and a half inches long with a small plate on the bottom. Thomas handed his lantern to Lenny and untied the key. They hurried back to the box, and Thomas shoved the key into the lock.

"Are you ready to get rich?" Thomas asked his brother.

"You know it," Lenny replied.

"One, two, three . . ." Thomas let the excitement build before turning the key in the lock. The hinges squeaked as he pried the lid open to reveal two books stacked one on top of the other. Thomas took each one out of the box. One had Lenny King embossed in gold leaf on the cover. The other said Thomas King in silver letters.



المعنى: Books?" Lenny asked, clearly disappointed. "How can books be worth more than silver or gold?"

> "These aren't just any books," Thomas said. "These are Bibles. Looks like there is one for each of us." He was disappointed too, but he tried not to show it.

"Maybe these are just clues for another puzzle," Lenny said. "Let's go ask Dad."

They emerged from the mine carrying their lanterns and new Bibles. Dad and Pastor Ralph sat beside a fire that glowed inside a ring of smooth stones. The air smelled of smoke and bug spray. Pastor Ralph was reading a Bible passage the boys knew their dad had heard a zillion times. Still, Dad was so interested in what his old friend was saying he didn't even notice Lenny and Thomas until they walked up to the campfire.

"Well, did you find any treasure?" Pastor Ralph asked. He closed his Bible before setting it down on the grass. He started rubbing his hands together above the campfire.

"We found a couple of Bibles, if that's what you mean," Thomas replied, passing his Bible to his dad. He'd already set his lantern down near the mine entrance, and he hoped no one noticed his disappointment.

Ralph kept his eyes on the flames as he said, "Did you know that

one of the people who wrote the Bible said, 'Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver'?"

"So . . . the Bibles are the treasure?" Lenny asked.

"I'm not sure it's worth millions," Thomas added quietly, kicking at some small rocks with the toe of his boot. His dad passed the Bible back, and Thomas ran his fingers along his name embossed on the cover.

Pastor Ralph laughed. "I thought you might say that," he said. "And I understand. I was about your age when my dad sat me down and encouraged me to start reading the Bible every day. It felt like he was giving me extra schoolwork, but because I loved my dad and I knew he loved me, I did it. It was hard at first, but it didn't take long before I started to enjoy the time I spent reading the Bible. Over the years, the Bible has become one of my greatest treasures."

"That's part of the reason I wanted to take this trip with you boys," Dad added. "You're growing up, and I don't just want your bodies to grow bigger and stronger, I want you to grow bigger and stronger in your friendship with Jesus. The Bible is a gift God has given you to help you grow."

"Are you telling us we *have* to read the Bible every day?" Thomas asked as he sat down next to Pastor Ralph. His brother plopped down in a camp chair nearby. "No," Dad replied. "No one can make you love the Bible, but watching Pastor Ralph's love for the Bible when I was a boy made me want to read it, and my hope is that as you grow up and watch your mom and me love the Bible, you'll love it too ... that it will become your treasure."

> "I try to read it," Lenny explained. He picked up a small stick and started poking at the coals in the fire ring. His Bible sat unopened on his lap. "But sometimes it feels boring. Other times it doesn't make much sense to me, or I can't figure out how what I am reading applies to my life. I dunno, Dad. Maybe the Bible just isn't for me."

"Can I tell you a secret?" Pastor Ralph asked, as he poked at some glowing embers with a stick.

"Sure," Lenny replied.

"I don't always understand the Bible either, and I was a pastor for a looong time. I don't always feel like reading it. Sometimes I'd rather be fishing, but when that happens I ask God to help me want to read and to help me search after the Truth found in the Bible"

"The same way I would search for silver and gold?" Lenny asked.

"You got it!" Pastor Ralph replied.

"The Bible is one of God's greatest gifts to us," Dad interjected. "It's more than a book. It shows us who God is, and it teaches us how God wants us to live."

"Is that why you and Momma read it so much?" Thomas asked.

"Yep," Dad replied. "While you two were in the mine, Pastor Ralph and I were talking about Proverbs 2:1–5. He taught me to love these verses when I was a kid like you."

"What's it about?" Thomas asked, genuinely curious. He knew the book of Proverbs was in the Old Testament. He worked to try and find it in his new Bible as mosquitoes buzzed around his head.

"Mind if I read it to you?" Pastor Ralph replied. His old, worn Bible was already open on his lap.

"Sure," Thomas said. He still wasn't convinced the Bible could be as interesting as his comic books or the adventure novels he and his brother liked to swap back and forth.

"Here it goes," Pastor Ralph said.

"My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands.

Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding."

A serious look came across his face as he read the next verse. He looked into the eyes of each boy and then their dad.

"Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures.

Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God."

The four of them sat in silence, staring at the smoke rising in a long column from the fire. Lenny had gone to church nearly every Sunday of his life, only missing when he was sick and Momma stayed home to take care of him. He had tried to read the Bible on his own many times before, but it never held his attention for long. But seeing how reading the Bible made his dad and Pastor Ralph light up, he suddenly found himself wanting to love the Bible like they did. There was something about the way their voices got when they read it that made him feel . . . inspired.

Thomas's mind was spinning too. He hated disappointing people, especially his dad, but he couldn't help thinking that the Bible just wasn't for him. He loved to read. That wasn't the problem. He often hid under his covers and read books by flashlight long after his parents kissed him goodnight. But he

ALL STREAMS

just didn't see what a book written so long ago had anything to do with his life.

Their dad broke the silence.

"Lenny, do you remember what your birthday card said?" he asked.

After thinking for a moment, Lenny replied, "Something about an epic adventure?"

"That's right. The real quest begins now. I'm not just talking about the adventures we're going to have on this trip, although I hope we have some epic ones. I'm talking about the search to know God through His Word."

"You want us to see our Bibles as treasure?" Lenny asked, holding his up in the air.

The boys could tell this meant a lot to their dad. He was the best person they knew and they both wanted to grow up to be just like him. They still had a lot of questions, but they were ready to learn more. Maybe the Bible was more than just a big old book after all.

"Ready for your next quest?" Pastor Ralph asked.

"Will there be bats involved?" Thomas asked as he used his hands to make a flapping noise over his brother's head.

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un sing and "No bats," Pastor Ralph laughed. "I want you to read your Bible every day for the rest of your trip. Start in the book of John. It's a bunch of stories about what Jesus did when He lived on earth. When you get home, talk to your dad about whether or not you still feel like the Bible isn't for you. Deal?"

"Deal," Lenny said.

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"Deal," his brother repeated.

"Let's shake on it," Pastor Ralph added.

The boys gave him a firm handshake, just like their dad had taught them to.

"I think there's some cookies left in the kitchen," Pastor Ralph said, changing the subject.

"Last one there's a rotten egg!" Lenny yelled.

Hours later, with their bellies full of cookies, the boys climbed into the bunk beds in Pastor Ralph's guest room and soon drifted off to sleep. Their new Bibles sat nearby, full of treasure and waiting to be opened.

Tag, You're It! E

Look up Psalm 119:65-72 in your Bible. Circle these words:

Commands Word Decrees Commandments Instructions

Though there are many different words used in this psalm, they all describe God's Word. A psalm is really a song, and although the author isn't named, some believe it may have been written by King David. He was a giant-slaying, sword-fighting, battle-winning king. He loved adventure as much as you do. Even though he was a rich king, God's Word was his greatest treasure. He wrote:

"Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight" (Psalm 119:111).

And . . .

"I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure" (Psalm 119:162).

The Bible LIR.

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"Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver" (Psalm 119:72).

What makes the Bible so valuable? The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:17, "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Imagine if the boys had found a silver sword that helped them win their battles against the fiercest enemy hiding out inside that old mine. What a wonderful treasure that would be! God's Word works like a different kind of sword, helping you fight back against Satan's lies so you can win the battle and stand firm on God's Truth.

God's Word = Your Treasure

Have you ever believed the lie that the Bible just isn't for you? The villain, the devil, knows what a treasure the Bible is, and he knows that it's full of wisdom that will help you know who God is. He spreads lies like:

- The Bible is just an ordinary book.
- The Bible isn't true.
- The Bible is boring.
- The Bible isn't for you.

But you know the Truth. The Bible is God's Word! It is one of the greatest treasures God gives His kids.

You've already learned a lot about the Bible.

- The Bible is a treasure map that helps you discover God's Truth.
- The Bible is a sword that helps you fight against the lies of the enemy.
- The Bible is a treasure, worth more than silver or gold.

But that doesn't mean you will always feel like reading it. **Feelings aren't facts.** Sometimes you will want to read the Bible and sometimes . . . you just . . won't. (Do you *always* feel like brushing your teeth, making your bed, or being nice to your siblings?) God has a lot to show you in His Word. It takes practice and the help of parents, teachers, and friends to better understand what God wants you to know. But instead of thinking about it like a homework assignment, think of it like a treasure hunt. There's gold in them thar hills!

Take the 30-Day Challenge

You'll never love the Bible less by reading it more. In fact, the opposite will happen. The more you read it, the more you will treasure it!

So, as you continue your journey along with Lenny and Thomas, join them in taking Pastor Ralph's challenge. Read your Bible every day for the next thirty days. Start in the book of John. (You will find a 30-day journey through the book of John in the back of this book.) Then take some time to talk to someone in your family about what you're learning. **If you're up to the challenge, sign your name on the line below.**

I'm Ready to Take the 30-Day Bible Reading Challenge!

Signed:



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