

April 15, 2018 • Third Sunday of Easter • Children's Sabbath • Recognition of Sunday School Teachers
• Commissioning of the Houston Mission Team



Children's Sabbath – Sermon Reflections

Genesis 1 (from Children's Storybook Bible)

In the very beginning, God's love bubbled over when there was nothing else - no trees, no birds, no animals, no sky, no sea - only darkness. Out of this love, God spoke, "Let there be light." And there was day. And there was night. And when the first day was done, God smiled and knew that it was good.

On the second day, God said, "Let there be sky where the clouds can float and the wind can blow." And the sky was bright blue and beautiful.

On the third day, God said, "Let the waters gather together into oceans and let the dry land appear." Now God decided to make the world even more dazzling, with tall trees and long grass. And then the first flower opened in all its glory.

On the fourth day, God said, "Let the sky be filled with the sun and the moon." And God scattered stars across the sky like sparkling diamonds.

On the fifth day God said, "Let there be birds to fly and sing and fish to swim and splash." And the world was filled with the joyous sound of birdsong.

On the sixth day, God said, "Let there be animals - elephants and giraffes, cats and mice, and bees and bugs." And suddenly the world was a very noisy place. But something was still missing.

Then God said, "I will make people, and I'll make them like me so they can enjoy the earth and take care of it." God did just that, and it was all so very, very good.

God looked at everything made and clapped in delight. "Isn't it wonderful!"

And on the seventh day, God laughed, and rested, and enjoyed this glorious creation.

GAVIN KIRTLEY

Hello church family, my name is Gavin Kirtley I'm in 5th grade at Grant Elementary. My birthday is really soon. I will be 11 on May 11th. I am excited to share with you about my life. I have been going to this church since I was born because my grandma and mom grew up in this church.

I like to come to church to see everyone, to go to Sunday school and see my friends. But I really like to eat the snacks at coffee hour. My old Sunday school teacher Carrie used to make jokes with us and made learning about God fun. We even created a picture on the wall of the bible stories we learned. One of my favorite things is to read verses in front of the church during the Christmas family service.

I just want to say that my family is AWESOME! My sister Quinlyn plays my favorite video game with me. My dad plays basketball with me at Stoner Park and the YMCA gym. He cheers me up when I've had a bad day and listens to me. We have a nightly practice with a bead necklace, where I say things like, I am thoughtful, and I am grateful - it helps me to prepare for the next day. I pray for kindness and the things I am thankful for.

My mom does almost everything with me, like playing at the gym or taking care of me when I'm sick. My soon-to-be stepdad watches Star Wars with me for movie night.

Easter and Christmas are extra special to my family. When it's Easter my family helps me find eggs that are filled with candy or sometimes even cash. On Christmas Eve we look at nativity scenes and remember that it is Jesus's birthday. On Christmas Santa gives us presents and we give each other presents. It makes me feel good to give people gifts.

I love to play sports. I enjoy all the fun times. For example, when I play baseball I like that I get stronger and I've made really good friends. It's also a very fun game to play. Once I got invited to a travel team and my coach was really hard on me so I began to not like it. I didn't want to play baseball again after that. After a little bit of time, I realized I didn't want a bad experience to keep me from playing baseball, which I love. I tried it again this year and now I am liking it again. I like hitting and pitching but I like pitching the most.

My friends are important to me because they are cool and they make me feel good when I am sad and down. Like in baseball my friends cheer me on when I hit, or they cheer me up when I strike out or miss a ball. In basketball when I take a shot and I make it, my friends pat me on the back. Or in flag football when I score my friends scream, in a good way.

As I get older and next year go to John Adams Middle school, I am proud to say that my family, friends and church are part of my life. I am thankful they support me and love me, even when I am in a bad mood. I know that God is with me all the time even as I go to a new school next year. The bible verse from Isaiah says "Those who hope in the lord will renew their strength." I have hope that next year and every year will be great because I have god, my family, my friends and my church.

COOPER NESSEL

My name is Jackson Cooper Nessel. I am in 5th grade at Franklin Elementary school. I was born in and currently live in Santa Monica. You see... when you grow up in Santa Monica, and you have loving parents, a house everybody wants to come to, good health, and more than enough food to eat - you don't realize you're living in a bubble.

My Mom calls it "The American dream" or as she describes it, "A privilege."

Last summer I started spending so much time focusing on what I didn't have and what I wanted and not what I have or need. My parents were holding back. If I didn't have something I wanted, or know it was coming soon I would feel angry. I was blaming my parents for my frustration. So mad at them for not buying it for me and not understanding why?

My Mom described this as her way of hoping I would feel the pain of not having something so I can appreciate what I do have.

She would say get uncomfortable, challenge yourself, push through something turn a corner... grow. I didn't understand what she was talking about most of the time.

As I started fifth grade this year. I guess I threw around the word “bored” one too many times over the summer because one day I was at school and the next, I found myself at 6AM on my way to LAX with my Mom... First stop CHINA.

Little did I know, was about to begin a 2-month journey (58 days to be exact) with 17 different flights and 24 different places to stay and this journey was to help uncover my PURPOSE and my PASSION.

Our journey started on Sept 30th and we flew 16 hours to Hong Kong. While there we walked thru all the different communities with unique cultures and learned about things I didn't know existed.

All kinds of different types of people, A lot of poverty and some stuff I have never seen here in California. I saw housing projects with rooms the size of a bathroom. I experienced villages with hanging fish bladders everywhere that made it smell like rotten fish, filthy eating conditions and more. This was all so interesting and we were only on day 3!

Our next stop was a small town named Chengdu, China. This is where the Panda bears live. After Physicals from our doctors my Mom signed us up to work in the Chengdu Panda Research Base as Volunteers. We wore heavy blue trousers and cleaned out panda cages, made food, supplied the bamboo from the forest and even fed the pandas. This, an experience I'll never forget. We learned about food in China. HOT POT my favorite, we were offered goose liver, pig brain and the many foods you don't even think of eating. We did not try everything but some things.

Now the part of the trip came where I was starting to feel uncomfortable. Here comes some of the most challenging times in my life to date beginning with us sitting in a small airport in China for over 9 hours with no fancy food courts, no vending machines no treats, no amenity's and I started to get very uncomfortable. For 7 more hours we sat in a small plastic chair waiting to board a flight to Lhasa TIBET. We arrived late and were met by (our driver) Mr. Norpu and our beautiful Tibetan guide Palmo who spoke Chinese, Tibetan, English and Hindi.

We were starting at 12,000 feet up and embarking on an adventure that would later become my favorite part of the entire trip.

You see the next stop my Mom had in store for us was Mount Everest Base Camp, elevation 17,250 feet. The journey would take us 10 days to get there and back. The 4 of us, our Driver, guide, me and my Mom traveled as a team throughout the Tibetan plateau, stopping into small villages, small towns, visiting religious monuments and witnessing the incredible traditions of the Tibetan people. Most of the food was made of Yak, boiled water and garnished with a little veggie floating inside, most the time, we drank it. In addition, we drank about 4 liters of water a day each and all with no bathrooms anywhere in site. Only short stops along the way that were pretty unbearable.

After days of travel, chasing sunsets, deep blue lakes, sites beyond my wildest imagination.... There were Yaks, sheep herds, cows, large Tibetan mastiff hounds, more Yaks, farmers, and Monks. We finally arrive at Mount Everest Base camp in the dark about 9PM. We were cold, tired, and hungry. The altitude 17,250 feet deep into the Himalaya Mountains.

At Base camp I experienced, altitude sickness, panic attacks resulting from lack of oxygen and downright freezing temperatures. At the camp there was a small building with a kettle where everyone sits and drinks hot tea and soup. When we walked into the “tea house” all eyes turned on the 4 of us and the first guide nearest us, stood to her feet, and started clapping.

Next another joined in and soon everyone in the tea house was staring at us standing and applauding. This was probably one of the biggest adventures they had embarked on and I learned later that very few 11-year old's had actually done this. I realized at that time I was doing something amazing, challenging and it felt purposeful.

I started to get the “meaning” of why we were there and what I was to get out of this challenge. I began to see what kind of courage and determination my Mom was craving from me and it made me feel 6 feet tall.

About 3 weeks into our journey we said goodbye to Tibet and Hello to Nepal. Landing in Katmandu was like out of a movie. Filthy, dusty streets, electrical wires everywhere, motorcycles with 3 people on them and a baby driving. It all made me quite nervous zipping in and out of traffic like a video game. After Katmandu, the Monkey temple and some ruins from the 2015 earthquake we then had to take a small plane over the central Himalayas to a little village near the Annapurna mountain peaks.

After changing planes, taking cabs, bikes and a hike we woke one morning at 4AM on journey to a secret location...destination - the sunrise over Nepal. What I experienced that morning was truly beautiful. It felt like only God could have planned this. It all seems so magical and I felt small. When you are on the other side of the world experiencing a sunrise, it seems more beautiful. I had spent a month out of my comfort zone now rising to this one moment to offer me reflection on how far I had come.

After leaving Nepal our next stop... 3 weeks in India! My mom and I traveled all throughout India from New Delhi to the southern tip of Thekkedy, staying 5 days in a thatched roof boat on the back waters of Kerala, onto visit the slums of Mumbai, the forts of Jaipur and back to the Northern Himalayan range in Rishikesh.

After being on this trip and having this great journey I am starting to realize how Gods love is everywhere, no matter who you are and how your life unfolds. He is in the shaky smile of a hungry kid as well as his family who could never imagine where I come from. He is there for those less fortunate in China and India and believe it or not they have strong Christian communities there. He is here in Santa Monica providing me with so much- too much. More than I ever realized before taking this trip.

I am grateful for this opportunity to see a new perspective, share my story, and find my purpose thru my privilege.

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