



**MONTHLY**  
DEVOTIONAL



## DAY ONE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God...’” Psalm 46:10 NIRV*

Well, howdy there, cowpokes! My name’s Curly and the story you are about to hear is absolutely one hundred percent true. Well, it’s mostly true anyway. It started out not too long ago just left of Nebraska on an old train traveling – you guessed it – west.

You see, a gentleman by the name of Professor Wisenheimer was taking a friend of his, Nerdo, on a trip across the Old West to see those sights you just can’t see from an airplane or the interstate. I’ll say it right now: there are just some things you’ve got to do in life, and one of them is see the West. It may not be like it was a hundred and fifty years ago, but there are still many pretty sights to see, I’ll tell you that right now!

I’ve driven herds of cattle through the majestic Rocky Mountains, across amber waves of grain and through the picturesque desert scenery – and there is still so much left for me to see. God created a beautiful landscape out here for us, pretty enough to have a church service in – even without a building!

No matter how busy you are, it is important to stop, go outside and take a look around at the beautiful place God has made for us. The Bible says to “Be still and know that I am God.” There’s no better place to do that than outside looking at the awesome splendor of a world created for our enjoyment. I tell ya, when I get to lookin’ at some of those beautiful mountains, I get speechless. God is my favorite artist. Look around for yourself and I’m sure you’ll agree.

I challenge you today, buckaroo: Stop for about twenty minutes or so and find a nice place outside to be still. That’s right, be still and know that God loves us and has made us a gorgeous place to ride around in.

Now, getting back to our train ride across the prairie, let me just say that it was a fantastic trip up until now. As the train crossed a magnificent canyon with a river located deep within it, the passengers were in awe of the splendid scenery of the Old West. Nerdo was quite content traveling along the railway, but let me tell you now that things were about to get downright unpredictable for this greenhorn!



*"... He danced in the sight of the Lord with all his might." 2 Samuel 6:14 NIRV*

"Would you look at that!" Professor Wisenheimer nudged Nerdo.

Nerdo gazed out the window of the train and saw what looked like two masked bandits on horses, suddenly riding alongside the train.

"Neat! We get a train ride and a cowboy show," the Professor said.

"This ain't no show," a very worried train conductor said. "It looks like a couple of notorious outlaws are about to try and rob this train!"

"YEEE-HAW!" a loud voice suddenly cried out from the back of the train. "Put those hands up and give me (hic) all your money!"

"It's Wild Bill Hiccup!" the train conductor said, looking at the outlaw towards the back of the train.

"How are we supposed to put our hands in the air and give you all our money at the same time?" Nerdo asked.

"Are you some sort of (hic) comedian? I'm the one who (hic) makes the jokes around here! Now stick-em up!"

"BURP!"

"What was that?" Professor asked.

The train conductor was even more terrified. He cried out, "It's Wild Bill's infamous outlaw partner, Wyatt Burp!"

"What?" Nerdo asked, "That's got to be the silliest thing I ever heard!"

Wild Bill Hiccup wasn't pleased to hear this. He pointed his six-shooters at Nerdo and told him, "Hey, you! Stand up, you (hic) lily-livered tenderfoot."

Nerdo slowly rose to his feet, not quite sure of what was going on.

"Now dance!" Wild Bill told him. Wild Bill fired his guns towards Nerdo's feet – and Nerdo was jumping all over just to keep his feet from getting hit.

"Har, har, har!" Wild Bill hollered.

"BURP!" Wyatt Burp said.

Now this sort of dancing was probably really embarrassing to Nerdo, but he didn't have much choice. In the Old Testament, there was a guy named David who did have a choice. He danced with all his might before the Lord. His wife was embarrassed about it, but remember that God just loves for you to be that excited about Him. The truth is, God is even more excited about you. So next time you head to church, don't wait for some outlaw to start aiming at your feet. Dance for the Lord with all your might!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY THREE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” Job 38:4 NIRV*

CLICK! Wild Bill Hiccup’s gun was out of bullets.

“Run!” Professor Wisenheimer suggested, not at all calmly.

That’s what Nerdo did. He ran with all his might in the other direction, onto the next car of the train, where he saw walking toward him a tall cowboy with a badge on his chest.

“Oh, great!” Nerdo said, relieved. “Am I glad to see you! There are these two guys in the next train over there that are trying to rob everyone.”

“We’ve finally caught you, Kid,” the sheriff said to Nerdo.

“Wait! I think there’s been some kind of mistake,” Nerdo said weakly.

“The only mistake you made is trying to rob this train today, mister,” the man answered.

At which point Nerdo ran back towards the train car he just came from. Now this wasn’t too bright, because that’s where he just left those two outlaws. In fact, he got there just in time to see Wild Bill Hiccup and Wyatt Burp walking toward him with some nasty grins. Oh, boy. How does Nerdo keep getting into this kind of trouble?

“Get (hic) back here!” Wild Bill Hiccup said.

“BURP!” Wyatt Burp said.

So Nerdo ran back toward the other train car again. But he didn’t make it all the way. Instead, he got to a place in between the train cars. With people running toward him from both directions, he did the only sensible thing a guy could do at this point: He jumped off the train.

OOF! BAM! BONK! BOOM! OUCH! CRASH! OOF! Nerdo rolled down a hill as gracefully as a multi-car accident at a NASCAR event. And as the train rolled away, he lay there in stunned silence at the day’s developments.

“Why me?” he asked the dirt. If he were laying face up, he would have asked the sky this instead.

“Why me?” It is such a big question to ask, isn’t it? Some of us will never find out the answers in this lifetime, but we must be like Job and trust God no matter what. We’re not the One who made the heaven and earth and everything that lives on it. God knows what He’s doing, even if it seems impossible to understand Him sometimes. We must keep that in mind even during the tough times and trust Him. He’ll see you through. He’s always been faithful.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY FOUR

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“But anyone who drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty. In fact, the water I give him will become a spring of water in him. It will flow up into eternal life.”*  
John 4:14 NIRV

Nerdo sat up and looked around. It was very, very hot and for miles and miles, he saw nothing but prairie. He tried to convince himself that this was all just a very bad dream, but he got tired of pinching himself after the third time!

He decided immediately that he had to keep moving. He stood up, wiped the dust off his pants and took a step following the railroad tracks.

“Whassup?” a voice asked him from out of nowhere.

“Who’s there?” Nerdo asked. He looked up and only saw a vulture sitting on the branch of a dead tree nearby. No one else.

“Whassup!” the vulture said.

Nerdo was startled! Was that really a talking vulture, or was the heat of the day getting to him?

“I thought you only eat dead things,” Nerdo said carefully to the vulture.

“I can wait,” the vulture grinned.

“Very funny,” Nerdo said. “Can you tell me the way to some water?”

“Okay, it’s pretty simple,” the vulture answered him, and then stretched his wing out, pointing back along the railroad track. “Just follow these tracks back that way a bit. Don’t you remember your train crossing that big river?”

Sure enough, the vulture was right. Nerdo suddenly remembered the canyon with the river in it, which he crossed not long ago.

Nerdo was about to take a step in that direction, when a thought occurred to him. He asked, “Why are you helping me? Don’t you want to eat me or something?”

“I don’t eat junk food,” the vulture responded.

“Oh,” Nerdo said. You can’t argue with that, he thought. Taking the bird’s advice, he turned to walk back towards the river. Maybe he would find some shade back that way too.

How many of you get real thirsty the moment you realize you won’t have a chance to get something to drink again for a while? That’s just the way Nerdo was. And that’s the way we all are, but Jesus said something pretty remarkable in the Bible. He said that if we were to drink from his well, we’d never be thirsty again.

Of course, he wasn’t talking about real water. It has been said that each of us has a God-sized hole in us. What that means is that we’ll always feel empty or thirsty for truth in life until we meet Jesus. He’s the only one that can fill the hole. He’s the one that will see to it that we’ll never thirst again. So drink up!



## DAY FIVE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“...But I followed the Lord my God with my whole heart.” Joshua 14:8 NIRV*

Nerdo staggered across the barren landscape for what seemed like hours under the blazing hot sun, but he knew he was getting closer to his destination: the river. Fortunately he had a big cowboy hat to put on his head. Sure, it was an oversized, silly looking thing, but it kept his face out of the sun.

It was this far into his journey that a nagging thought entered his mind: What happened to the train? Didn't they know he had fallen off? Surely Professor Wisenheimer must have told someone that Nerdo was not on the train anymore. And it was then that the really bad thought occurred to him: what if they were looking for him at the spot where he fell off?

Oops. He wasn't there at that spot anymore! Uh-oh! Now he was in deep trouble. The only thing he could do was press on until he found some sort of civilization – and water!

Of course, wandering around in the desert is no picnic. The Israelites did that for forty years because they didn't believe God when He told them it was time to enter the Promised Land. Out of the twelve spies that went into the Promised Land, only two, Caleb and Joshua, believed in God's promise that this land flowing with milk and honey would be theirs. Unfortunately, the other spies didn't trust God and convinced all of the Israelites that this new land was impossible to enter into.

And so the Israelites wandered in circles around the desert for another forty years. But Caleb and Joshua never gave up and never stopped trusting God. Because of their faith and trust, these two entered the Promised Land and saw God's promises to them come to pass.

When wandering in the desert like Nerdo, especially because of the mistakes of others, it can be hard to trust God that things will work out in the end. But we must always remember that God knows a whole lot more than us, and if we would only trust Him, we too will see our Promised Land.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY SIX

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“What I'm about to tell you is true. Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:40 NIRV*

Naturally, it was just at a point that Nerdo felt like giving up that he saw the most beautiful thing he could ever see at that moment: the canyon and the river! With renewed energy, Nerdo doubled his pace and staggered as quickly as he could towards the rushing water in the canyon below him. It was quite a climb down to the water's edge, but he felt he could make it without any problem. He made his way down a bit past a small cave and edged along a cliff to his left when something made him jump!

“Hey, varmint!” a voice called out from his right. “What do you think you're doing near our hideout? You best be ready to draw, mister!”

Nerdo turned to see two cowboys looking right at him, both with their guns drawn. Not again! As he turned to face them though, he noticed their facial expressions change dramatically!

“Sorry, sir!” one said a little too quickly.

“We didn't know it was you,” the other said, suddenly worried.

Nerdo didn't quite know what to make of all this. He just wanted a drink.

“I just want a drink,” he told them.

“By all means,” said one of the cowboys immediately. He picked up a canteen off the ground and said, “Let me give you something from my canteen!”

As Nerdo gratefully took a drink of the bandit's water, he noticed that both of these characters were looking at him closely, studying him.

“My name's Black Bart,” one told him nervously, “and might I say what an honor and privilege it is to have you here. Sir.”

“Yeah – and I'm Dusty,” the other said. “Welcome to our secret hide-out. Make yourself at home here. ‘Mi casa su casa’ and all that!”

Nerdo had finished drinking, and gave the two a curious look. He opened his mouth to speak and said, “My name's – ”

“Oh, we know who you are,” Black Bart laughed.

“Come on inside our hideout and get out of this sun,” Dusty said.

It was one of the best things Nerdo could hear at the time, so he did just that. As soon as he felt the cool of the cave, he felt a wave of relief sweep over him. Being kind to others is something the Bible commands us to do. Nerdo knew it was a fruit of the Spirit, but he also remembered that whatever you do to others, according to the Bible, you are also doing that for Jesus. So by being nice to Nerdo, these two bandits – Nerdo thought – were doing something nice for Jesus. How nice.

The sad part of all of this is that Nerdo had no idea the real reason Dusty and Black Bart were acting so friendly!



## DAY SEVEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“He also sent a message to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. It said, ‘The king of Moab is refusing to obey me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?’ ‘Yes. I’ll go with you,’ he replied. ‘My men will go with you. My horses will also go with you.’”*  
2 Kings 3:7 NIRV

“Jumping Jehoshaphat!” Black Bart said. “I can’t believe the kind of luck we’ve had lately.”

Nerdo looked around at his surroundings. He was in what looked like an abandoned mine with walls that appeared to be barely held up by old, rotting beams.

“This here mine runs deep into the side of this canyon,” Dusty explained. “It used to be a gold mine back in the day, but you can’t find much of anything in it now.”

“Except for a whole lot of these babies,” Black Bart said, while holding up several sticks of dynamite. His grin was ear to ear.

“Whoa,” Nerdo gasped. “That looks dangerous!”

“Yup,” Black Bart nodded. “This sort of thing could accidentally blow up a bank wall or something.”

“Look guys,” Nerdo said. “I’m just wanting to get to the nearest town.”

“I bet you are,” Dusty said smirking. “Probably one with a bank in it.”

“He can’t help himself,” Black Bart laughed.

Nerdo laughed too, only to be polite. He had no idea what they were talking about. He asked, “Guys, can you help me or not?”

“Sure,” Dusty said, “and maybe you can help us too. Know what I mean?”

“Okay,” Nerdo agreed. “Sure. I’ll help you if you can get me back to a town.”

“Let’s seal the pact then and make you a part of our gang,” Black Bart announced. He spit on his hand and put it out for Nerdo to see.

“Spit shake,” he said to Nerdo.

Nerdo made a big noise from the back of his throat and then spit on Black Bart’s hand. Black Bart quietly looked at his own hand, and then up to Nerdo. Normally, this sort of thing would make Black Bart quite furious. But Black Bart was trying to keep his cool today, so he smiled thinly, grabbed Nerdo’s hand and shook it.

“Welcome to the gang,” Dusty proclaimed.

Now you folks may certainly want to pay attention closely here, because Nerdo has just made a partnership with some people that perhaps he shouldn’t have. A king by the name of Jehoshaphat also once made an alliance that he shouldn’t have, and he wound up with his whole army stuck in the middle of the desert without water. They were just praying for a miracle. Fortunately, God answered his prayers and rescued he and his armies. But he wouldn’t have gotten into this trouble in the first place if he were more careful about who he associated with.

The same can be said for you, partners!





## DAY EIGHT

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“When you sin, the pay you get is death. But God gives you the gift of eternal life because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done.” Romans 6:23 NIRV*

They rested for a while in the mineshaft, but Dusty soon announced that they would be leaving for town. Nerdo couldn't wait. Conveniently, there were a few extra horses around in a makeshift stall, so Nerdo was able to (eventually) get up onto a horse and follow Dusty and Black Bart on their horses towards the nearest town. Nerdo was terrible at riding and hung on to his horse for dear life, but he traveled behind his two new friends and they never noticed.

It was perhaps a half-hour into their journey that they made their way into an old town that was everything you can picture an old western town would look like. From the old blacksmith shop on the right and the saloon on the left to the sheriff's office just past that, this town had everything Nerdo had ever seen in an old western movie. He was amazed.

“What in tarnation!” Dusty hollered, looking at a wall to his right. Nerdo saw what he was looking at, and a couple things dawned on him a little too late.

Black Bart laughed when he saw what Dusty saw. Black Bart said, “Reward for Black Bart: \$500. Yes!”

“I'm only worth \$300 on my poster,” Dusty complained.

“Har, har, har!” Black Bart bellowed.

Nerdo was riding with wanted men! Outlaws! He had to find a way out – maybe when they weren't looking. But where was he? How could he sneak away?

Black Bart's laughter was cut short when he heard Dusty gasp.

“Would you look at that,” Dusty said, pointing.

On the wall further down was yet another wanted poster, where Dusty was pointing. On it was a picture of Nerdo! Nerdo couldn't read from that distance anything else on the poster, but he could read clearly that the reward for bringing him in was a whopping \$1,000!”

“That's awesome, cowboy!” Dusty said, slapping Nerdo on the back.

“You the man!” Black Bart said.

Nerdo was stunned! He had no idea what he did that would make people want to arrest him. He was suddenly scared and desperate to get back to Professor Wisenheimer.

Have you ever thought about the fact that we all have a wanted poster with our name on it? It's true! We're all outlaws, according to Paul in the book of Romans, because we've all sinned and fallen short of the grace of God. The good news is that God has done something wonderful for us through Jesus' death on the cross. The price has been paid for our crimes. Jesus tore all our wanted posters down, wadded them up and threw them into the fire.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY NINE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*"I have hidden your word in my heart so that I won't sin against you." Psalm 119:11 NIRV*

"We just missed it," Black Bart said, disappointed. "The bank's already closed, but we can hit the target first thing tomorrow before anyone expects it. Robbers usually strike late in the morning, but I always say the early bird gets the worm."

"Yeah," Nerdo said nervously. "But the second mouse gets the cheese."

"Ha," Dusty laughed, swatting Nerdo on the back. "I like you."

Dusty and Black Bart decided to spend the night at an old place at the edge of town, but it was certainly too early to turn in for the night.

"Let's go catch a show," Dusty suggested.

"There's a rodeo show tonight at the arena," Black Bart said. "Let's go catch some action."

Dusty liked that idea, so the three of them went to the rodeo, with Nerdo trying to figure out the best way to escape the entire time. It was apparent he couldn't go to the sheriff's office – not with a wanted poster like that on the wall. He was stuck in a bad situation!

Despite all this, the rodeo show was an incredible time for everyone. It started out with an opening act that impressed even Black Bart.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"It's Cowgirl Kate," Dusty said matter-of-factly. "She's an old friend of mine, you know."

"No way!" Black Bart said, astonished.

Cowgirl Kate stood in the middle of the arena in front of hundreds of people in her trademark western gear, an ivory-handled pistol in each hand. Her act was simple – she was an expert marksman. That meant she could hit with a gun nearly any target at some amazing distances.

"She can hit a flea off a dog at five hundred yards," the announcer boasted, though the only targets she ever shot were tin cans set up on fence posts quite a long ways off.

"Amazing!" Black Bart said, "Why don't you go down and introduce us after the show?"

"We're not exactly on good terms right now," Dusty said, and left it at that.

As Cowgirl Kate knocked over can after can with incredible precision, it should be noted that it takes practice to be that accurate. Yes, the same could be said for reading your Bible, buckaroos. A lot of us carry around an unloaded weapon because we don't spend time reading the Bible or committing to our minds the scriptures. The problem with that is when it comes time to hit the targets, our guns are unloaded because we don't know the right scripture to shoot off at a situation. You've got to practice and have a loaded weapon, friends. Keep that in mind, and you'll hit the target each time.



*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding.”  
Proverbs 3:5 NIRV*

“And now,” the announcer boomed. “Here’s the moment you’ve been waiting for! As a special part of the show, it is now time for the bull riding competition!”

The crowd erupted in thrilled applause and everyone who was sitting there in that rodeo arena was fully focused on the show that was going to take place in front of them. For just a moment, Nerdo even forgot how bad he wanted to escape from the two sitting next to him, because he was so excited.

“It’s the bulls and the blood, the dust and the mud,” Black Bart said to Dusty.

“And don’t forget the roar of the Sunday crowd,” Dusty added helpfully.

Nerdo had no idea what either was talking about, but he was about to see for himself his first bull ride. Within seconds, a bell chimed loudly and the competition began. The audience roared as each competitor attempted to outdo another by sitting atop a whirling, swirling, jumping, bucking bull for as long as he could.

Bull riding is a simple concept on paper. You just sit on top of a bull and ride it for at least eight seconds. The problem is this: the bull doesn’t want to be ridden. Nope! Not one bit. Oh, and add this to the equation: the bull doesn’t like you either.

For one moment, Nerdo shared a thought that many of us have had perhaps once in our lives: whoever thought up the sport of bull riding was absolutely crazy!

The funny thing is that many cowboys will tell you that life is just like a rodeo. Now hear me out before you start laughing: Life is like the bull. It will take you this way and that, and it takes determination and skill for you to stay on top of it. Believe me, you don’t want life stomping all over you!

You might wonder, why do so many cowboys get back on top of the bull after going through a ride like that? The answer is simple: because it is exciting, and there’s a big reward at the end if they win. Life is exciting if you look at it the right way, and we all know there’s a big reward at the end.

So, when your life starts going in unpredictable ways, just hang on and enjoy the ride. Trust that God has got everything all figured out for you and never, ever let go!



## DAY ELEVEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*"A huge cloud of witnesses is all around us. So let us throw off everything that stands in our way. Let us throw off any sin that holds on to us so tightly. Let us keep on running the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1 NIRV*

The bull-riding competition continued and Nerdo was completely delighted! He whooped and hollered with the rest of the crowd and bought himself a big pennant to wave around just like he was at a football game. He had even ordered cotton candy for Black Bart, Dusty and himself to enjoy. The three of them gobbled it up faster than you can say "Texarkana Two-Step."

It seemed they saved the best rider for last, because the final competitor had absolutely amazed the crowd. His name was announced as Cal Hazard, the best bull rider this side of the Mississippi. Boy, did he live up to his reputation!

When he finally got off the bull though, a problem presented itself. The problem was that this particular bull was pretty upset with Cal Hazard for riding him so long. In fact, this bull made up its mind that even though the rider was off its back, it was still going to stomp Cal Hazard flatter than a pancake. The bull began its charge, and Cal decided it was high time to make a run for it. As you've probably guessed, there was a lot of tension in the air and everyone was nervous. But all of you readers out there who are familiar with a rodeo know what happens next.

Yes, that's right: this is where the rodeo clowns step in. You see, these rodeo clowns aren't there just to make people laugh. These clowns have another job, and that is to distract the bull from pounding riders into filthy mush.

This is just what happened the night of the big show. The rodeo clowns distracted the bull long enough for Cal to get away, and the crowd let out a big sigh of relief.

"That bull would have knocked Cal Hazard into next month if it weren't for those clowns," Black Bart noted.

Hold on, I think I feel another analogy coming on, folks. That means there's a likeness. In this story, we're like the bull. We've got to stay focused on our goals. Though our goal isn't to run anyone over and pound them, we do have a lot of things we need to keep running towards. For example, in our lives, our goals are doing the right things and pleasing God. We need to keep running in the right direction and not take our eyes off the finish line God has for us.

But in comes the devil. He's just a clown, and his job is to distract you any way he can. If only you'd stay focused on the direction God has you aimed at, you'd be okay – but in comes that clown and he starts doing all sorts of tricks to get you distracted.

Next time you feel tempted to do something you shouldn't, remember that these temptations are coming straight from a clown who'd like nothing better than to distract you from what it is you're supposed to be doing. Keep that in mind, folks.

Then focus on your goal and CHARGE!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY TWELVE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“So obey God. Stand up to the devil. He will run away from you.” James 4:7 NIRV*

After the show, Black Bart, Dusty and Nerdo began walking back towards their hotel to spend the night. They didn't make it that far though, because Black Bart saw the saloon and he wanted to spend a little time there.

“Let's go play some poker,” he told the others.

Dusty added, “Yeah, now that saloon is my kind of atmosphere!”

This was not Nerdo's kind of atmosphere. It isn't yours, either. But Nerdo was caught up in the excitement of the moment and thought he'd be like a real cowboy if he hung out in a saloon, so the three of them walked through the swinging doors and straight towards the poker tables.

“A mechanical bull!” Dusty said, suddenly distracted.

Sure enough, there was a mechanical bull in the corner, currently in the process of throwing a rider.

Dusty looked at Nerdo and said, “You know you want to try it!”

“I don't know,” Nerdo stuttered.

But Dusty and Black Bart pushed Nerdo towards it, and before he knew it, Nerdo was on top of a mechanical bull with Black Bart about to put the money in for the ride.

“Put one hand in the air,” Dusty said, “and hold on for dear life with the other!”

Just like that, the mechanical bull started whirling about, flinging Nerdo this way and that. It was a furious little machine and it didn't take long for it to send Nerdo airborne straight into a table of the toughest looking cowboys around.

The table shattered, sending food and drinks everywhere, and those cowboys there weren't pleased at all. Nerdo slowly rose up to his feet just as one was taking an angry swing at him. But Nerdo fell back at just the right time and the cowboy punched someone else instead! And that is how the big saloon fight started. Once one cowboy hit another, the other threw a chair, which accidentally smacked into another cowboy, and soon everyone was fighting everyone else.

“Yee-haw!” Black Bart said, getting into the fight. This was just before he got hit on the back of the head with a chair and fell down, unconscious. In fact, the next time he, Dusty and Nerdo would wake up, it would be in a jail cell.

If only the three had stayed away from that sort of environment, then they wouldn't be in the mess they were in now. Nerdo knew better. He heard that little voice in his head telling him to stay away. You yourself have heard that voice before too. It is the Holy Spirit, warning you to keep away from places that can lead to trouble. The Holy Spirit is your friend, trying to help you. If you ignore that voice, you might not end up in jail like Black Bart, Dusty and Nerdo, but you'll end up down the wrong path, that's for sure. And that's a dusty trail you don't want to be on.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY THIRTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying. They were also singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening to them.” Acts 16:25 NIRV*

A jail cell is not the place you want to wake up, of course. Nerdo scratched his head and rubbed his eyes. If only he didn't go to that saloon last night – then he wouldn't be in this sort of trouble.

“Here we go again,” Black Bart said, winking at Dusty.

“You've been in jail before?” Nerdo asked.

“Oh yeah,” Dusty answered him. “We're experts on many of the local jail cells around here. If you're going to be a real outlaw, you have to get to know all the town jail cells pretty well.”

“Yeah,” Black Bart agreed. “For example, the bathrooms in Silver City's jailhouse are pretty clean.”

“And the food is real good in Cripple Creek's lockup,” Dusty chimed in.

“Oh yeah,” Black Bart had the same opinion. “Food is real good there. But the best jail cells have got to be in Deadwood.”

“Deadwood?” Nerdo asked. He couldn't believe these guys have been in jail this much!

“Definitely Deadwood,” Dusty smiled, thinking back on his experiences there.

“But how did you get out of all of these jail cells?” Nerdo asked.

“Oh, we escaped,” Black Bart said, smiling.

“Escaped?” Nerdo's jaw was dropping.

“Nothing a little TNT can't handle,” Dusty grinned. “Show him the dynamite, Black Bart.”

Black Bart reached into his pockets and found...nothing!

“It's gone!” Black Bart cried.

“What?” Dusty was shocked.

“Your reputation must precede you,” Nerdo said, shaking his head back and forth.

“What are we going to do?” Black Bart asked to no one in particular.

“Hold on, I'll think of something!” Dusty said. But Dusty couldn't think of a thing. They were in jail and it looked like they were there to stay!

It is at times like this when you're stuck somewhere in a bad situation that you may feel tempted – as Nerdo was – to grumble, complain and make a big stink out of the way life has treated you. But there were a couple guys in the Bible by the name of Paul and Silas who bucked that trend. You see, these two were also in jail. And rather than whine and nag about being in a prison cell, these two did something unusual.

They praised God! The truth is, we should do the same thing when we're in the middle of a pickle. God is watching to see what sort of attitude we've got, and He wants to see if we'll trust Him even in the bad times. Keep a good attitude and watch how God will help you. He's an expert at getting us out of pickles!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY FOURTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed hard to God for him.” Acts 12:5 NIRV*

“I got an idea,” Dusty exclaimed! “Maybe one of us can pretend we’re real sick and get the guard’s attention. When he gets inside the cell, we’ll bop him on the head!”

“Naw,” Black Bart argued, “That’s been done too much. Guards are smarter these days.”

“How about we pray?” Nerdo asked innocently.

Black Bart and Dusty gave a puzzled look at Nerdo. Then they laughed.

“You’re funny,” Dusty told him. But Nerdo prayed anyway.

Praying is always a good idea. In the book of Acts, Peter was in a jail cell himself. He was no hardened criminal and he didn’t do anything to deserve being there. So the other apostles began to pray to God for a miracle. Boy, did God come through in a big way! You should read it for yourself – an angel came to bust Peter out of prison in the greatest jailbreak story ever told. The point of that story, partners, is to never, ever underestimate the power of praying.

Anyway, back to our story: Just as Nerdo knelt down to pray, the bricks started to fly. Everywhere! There was a huge explosion and one of the walls of their jail cell collapsed, crumbling nearly on top of them. What was going on?

As an answer to this dramatic question, a masked figure appeared in the haze and came rushing through the new hole in the wall!

“Anyone who don’t want to get killed best be getting out the back,” she said.

“Holy cow!” Nerdo exclaimed.

“It’s an escape!” Black Bart rejoiced. “We’re getting busted out!”

Nerdo, Black Bart and Dusty followed the mysterious figure through the hole in the wall and quickly down an alley, behind some old buildings and as fast as they could towards an old blacksmith’s shop, which they entered. Amazingly, it all happened so fast that no one saw them escape through the back.

Once they were safely inside the blacksmith’s shop, the mysterious figure turned around and took down the bandana that covered her face. It was Cowgirl Kate!

“What in blue blazes are you doing here?” Dusty asked.

“I’m busting you out, Dusty,” she answered. “And I think you know why.”

“I told you I’d be right back, Kate,” Dusty explained.

“That was five months ago,” Cowgirl Kate told him rather harshly, “and you said you were going to stop being an outlaw. You promised!”

“I’ll get you your money back, Kate,” Dusty pleaded. “Just don’t shoot!”

“I gave you that money to go buy us a marriage license!” Kate said.

“Put me back in jail!” Dusty cried out, “Hang me! Anything but that!”

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY FIFTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son. Anyone who believes in Him will not die but will have eternal life.” John 3:16 NIRV*

Cowgirl Kate was determined. She said, “I’m going to marry you, Dusty. Even if it is at gunpoint!”

Of course, you readers are probably wondering why anyone would want to marry the likes of Dusty or Black Bart. Love is a funny thing that way. Some say love is blind, though I suspect that’s not quite right. Especially when you consider that famous expression, “God is love.” Now if God is love, then love is definitely not blind! The reason I say that is because God knows every little thing about us there is to know – even all those bad bits. He can see right through us! Yet, and this is the good part, He loves us anyway despite all the bad stuff.

All through the Old Testament, you see God patiently waiting for those people He loves, the Israelites, to love Him back. Sure, a few did, like David or Moses or some of those other prophets who were obedient to His word. But for the most part, those Israelites were a bunch of outlaws. Now before you start judging those Israelites, think of all the rotten things you yourself have ever done. Sadly, we’re all sinners and outlaws!

But God still loves us. He isn’t blind. He knows all the things we’ve done that don’t please Him. But again, here’s the good part: He still loves us. Pretty cool, huh?

“Kate,” Dusty said, “You’re probably wondering why we’re here in town like this. I know I was scared and said some dumb things a moment ago, but the real reason we were in town was so that I could come back to marry you.”

“Really?” Cowgirl Kate asked, not quite sure about all this.

“It was going to be a blast today,” Black Bart added.

“Yeah,” Dusty lied. “We were in that saloon last night celebrating my upcoming wedding, when some other folks got us in trouble. Anyway, we never got a chance to go get the rings at the jewelry shop at the end of town.”

“Jewelry shop?” Cowgirl Kate said.

“Yeah,” Dusty exclaimed, winking at Black Bart. “We’ve got to go get the wedding rings, right?”

“Oh, Dusty!” Cowgirl Kate gushed.

“We’ll be right back, okay?” Black Bart said.

Cowgirl Kate was smiling ear to ear! “I’ll be waiting right here, Dusty!”

Black Bart grabbed Nerdo and followed Dusty out the door as fast as they could, nearly stumbling through. As Cowgirl Kate sat there pleasantly smiling, she began to think of the nice wedding she’d always envisioned. She began to think of her wedding ring and what it would look like. She began to think of the jewelry shop. And then that’s when a thought streaked through her mind like an angry lightning bolt. You see, folks: there is no jewelry shop in this town. Dusty tricked her.

“He did it again!” Cowgirl Kate shrieked! “DUSTY! YOU GET BACK HERE!”



# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY SIXTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“Then you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free.” John 8:32 NIRV*

There was a lot of commotion coming from town. That means there was a lot of noise. Though Nerdo, Black Bart and Dusty couldn't see it, their guess was correct that right now a posse was being formed to go after them.

“Great horny toads!” Black Bart shouted. “The whole town is probably after us now. Let's get out of here and head west.”

“I say we head east,” Dusty argued. “That's just what the posse would be expecting us to do.”

Black Bart looked at Nerdo and asked, “What do you think, partner?”

“Cows!” Nerdo said, pointing at a herd of cattle. He obviously wasn't paying attention. Yet Black Bart evidently saw some merit to what he was saying.

“Great idea,” Black Bart told Nerdo, patting him on the back.

“What in tarnation are you talking about?” Dusty asked.

The noise from town was getting louder. The posse was getting closer!

“We'll hide amongst those cows for a while,” Black Bart said, “and when the posse moves on, we can figure out where to go from there.”

“That is a great idea!” Dusty said. “Come on, let's go!”

The threesome crossed an old dirt road, climbed a fence and made their way amongst the large herd of cattle before them. And that's where I came in, folks.

“Are you the boys that are going to help me drive this herd?” I asked them.

They didn't see me approach and all three looked like a possum in the middle of the road surprised that there might actually be a car there.

“Drive the herd?” Nerdo asked.

“Yeah,” I answered. “I sent for some fellas to help me drive this herd west to the Lazy J Ranch that way a bit. Are you the guys I sent for?”

To say “no” would have meant facing the town posse – and facing jail again, so Black Bart and Dusty immediately told me, “Yes sir!”

“Great,” I told them. “Come with me this way and I'll introduce you to the others. We'll start the drive in about an hour, but you can have some vittles inside with us before we make our push west.”

You can see for yourself in this story how lies tend to grow and grow, just like Pinocchio's nose. Nerdo knew this trap before, and he also knew he had to explain everything to me as soon as he got a chance.

The truth will set you free, partners, but lies can only get you stuck in the dark. The truth is just like the light, and only when everything is all lit up with truth can you have that inner peace that Black Bart and Dusty were chasing after. Nerdo was hoping Dusty and Black Bart could get a little light in their lives about now, because things were getting pretty dark.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY SEVENTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“We put a bit in the mouth of a horse to make it obey us. We can control the whole animal with it. In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body. But it brags a lot. Think about how a small spark can set a big forest on fire.” James 3:3, 5 NIRV*

I brought Nerdo, Black Bart and Dusty into my cabin to meet the others that would be driving the herd with us. “Here’s Cookie,” I said, pointing at my master chef.

Cookie spoke as he usually does, though not many are quite sure what he ever says. Calamity Jane, who was also in the room, understands him completely.

“He said he’s glad to meet you,” she said, “and so am I. My name’s Calamity Jane and I’ll be driving the herd with you cowboys.”

“A girl?” Nerdo said. “You’re just a girl – how can you handle these cows?”

Oh dear. It might be at this point a wise thing to share with you cowpokes a scripture I’ve kept close to my heart all these years. It reminds me of how much trouble our tongues can get us into if we don’t watch them closely. In the Bible, in the book of James, there’s a passage that explains that our tongues – that is, our words – can lead us in a good direction, or as Nerdo is about to find out, a bad one. Just like a bit in a horse’s mouth, those words of yours can lead you in one way or another. That’s why we have to be careful and think before we speak. Bottom line is this: next time you’re tempted to blab about someone you don’t like, you best keep this scripture in mind. That tongue of yours can get you in a world of trouble, as we’re about to see.

“Say what?” Calamity Jane said to Nerdo.

“He’s just teasing you,” Dusty said quickly, hoping to diffuse the situation. But it was too late.

Calamity Jane lassoed Nerdo faster than you can say “tres burritos por favor!” Yanking the rope, she pulled Nerdo close enough to roughly bulldog him to the ground and then hog-tie him with some extra rope. Calamity Jane next reached for a branding iron and held it up high. That thing looked red hot!

“Any more smart remarks?” she asked.

“Pleasure to meet you,” Black Bart said.

Cookie started laughing at that – in fact I did too. That seemed to calm everyone down. Calamity Jane is a regular firecracker, and the last thing any greenhorn wants to do is set her off. Anyway, introductions were made all around, and even Nerdo was eventually untied. I believe he learned his lesson.

I’ll tell you this now: I had no idea this little drive of ours was going to be as eventful as it was!



## DAY EIGHTEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“He put His Spirit in our hearts and marked us as His own. We can now be sure that He will give us everything He promised us.” 2 Corinthians 1:22 NIRV*

Pretty soon, we were off and running with the herd of cattle. I let Nerdo, Black Bart and Dusty use a few of the horses from my corral. When they saw their horses, Dusty and Black Bart were as giddy as a little girl who just got a pony for her birthday!

Still they both seemed a little nervous about their job, looking this way and that as we were leaving. That’s why I put them in the middle of the herd, while Calamity Jane, Nerdo and I kept to the back with Cookie and the chuck wagon.

About a half-hour into the ride, Nerdo asked me, “Are all these cows yours?”

“They sure are,” I answered him.

“How do you know if one isn’t yours?” he asked.

“Simple,” I pointed out a mark on the backside of a nearby cow and asked Nerdo, “You see that brand there?”

He nodded, so I continued, “That mark is on every cow here. That means that cow is my cow. It belongs to me.”

“What if we see a cow that doesn’t have any marking on him?” Nerdo asked me.

I winked at him and said, “Then we’ll try to get a brand on him as soon as possible!”

As you’re going to find out soon enough, we ourselves are an awful lot like these cattle I was trying to drive west. The first similarity comes from the fact that each of us, when we agree to join up with God’s herd, is actually branded. Now before you start panicking, we aren’t branded with a red-hot poker, so calm down buckaroos! But God does have a seal on us that says that we belong to Him and not some other herd that is heading in the wrong direction.

Being a part of God’s herd is quite a privilege, but it doesn’t mean you have the right to go wandering off. There are bandits out there intending to steal cattle, not to mention all those critters that like to eat cow. So stay close to the herd – that means go to church. And be sure to follow the trail boss. That’s God!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY NINETEEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19 NIRV*

We had stopped a moment to give our horses a drink when Calamity Jane spotted something out on the hillside not far away.

“You any good at roping?” Calamity Jane asked Nerdo with a gleam in her eye.

“Not really,” Nerdo answered, and added, “and you don’t have to give me another lesson either.”

“Is there something wrong with you?” Calamity Jane asked him.

“Nope,” Nerdo answered. “I’m in my prime.”

“Look. I ain’t going to tie you up again,” Calamity Jane said, pulling out her lasso.

“Are you sure?” Nerdo asked.

Without answering, Calamity Jane rode her horse off toward the hillside, swinging her lasso way above her head. Nerdo saw what it was she was riding towards: a stray cow. Effortlessly, she threw the lasso with perfect aim, catching the stray cow around the neck with her rope.

“Whoa!” Nerdo said, watching her pull it towards the rest of the herd.

“You’ve got to be good at roping them in if you want to be a good cowboy,” I told Nerdo. That was the truth right there. We always want to rope in cows, whether they are runaways or new cows to join the herd.

You yourself may not be able to rope and ride on a horse, but you can bring in more folks into God’s herd. It’s real simple. God wants you to share the good news. Look at the Great Commission in your Bible in the book of Matthew. It says, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.” That means you’ve got to giddy-up, partner. We’re told to increase God’s herd, and one of the best ways to do that is by doing a little roping.

How do you rope more people into God’s herd? Simple: You rope people in with your words and your actions. Invite someone to church and don’t forget to act like a Christian. People are watching!

Now it was after this roping lesson that Cookie spoke a few moments. I wouldn’t have understood a minute of it if it weren’t for the fact that he was passing out plates for us to eat on. It was suppertime! And as Cookie was placing on Nerdo’s plate a big pile of beans, I looked over at Nerdo and sized him up.

“Black Bart and Dusty are real cowboys, sure enough,” I told Nerdo. “But I have a funny feeling about you. You can’t rope, and you don’t know much about cows. Are really a cowboy?”

And that’s when Nerdo spilled the beans.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

DAY TWENTY

TRAILBLAZERS

*“God didn’t give us a spirit that makes us weak and fearful. He gave us a spirit that gives us power and love. It helps us control ourselves.” 2 Timothy 1:7 NIRV*

While Dusty and Black Bart were still in the middle of the herd, tending after the cattle there on the dusty trail, Nerdo told me his whole story up until this point. It was quite interesting, that’s for sure. And I could tell he was telling the truth. It was as if a huge burden was being lifted from his shoulders. Being in the middle of the drive, I made up my mind to continue to ride with all three of these fellas until we got to the ranch. Once we got home, I’d then figure out what to do with Black Bart and Dusty. Until that time, we agreed to keep quiet about it.

When we stopped and camped for the night, I was glad of my decision: Nerdo spotted a rattlesnake right next to my sleeping bag just as we were going to rest for the night, and I’m telling you it was right where I was about to sit down. That snake would have sunk his fangs into me, that’s for sure! It goes without saying that Nerdo pretty much saved my life. So it also goes without saying that I was glad ever since then that I kept him around.

Anyway, all of us finished setting up camp and made ourselves a campfire to sit around for a few moments before turning in to go to sleep. I made the best of the time there by plucking my guitar and starting an old-fashioned sing-a-long. We even had some great storytelling, sharing true adventure stories of the old west. When I got about halfway through my tale though, Black Bart interrupted me.

“This isn’t one of those tall tales, like that story about Billy the Squid,” Black Bart asked, half-laughing.

“Nope,” I told him. “These are all one hundred percent true!”

The stories I like to tell are about the brave circuit riders of the 1800’s. For those of you who don’t know, circuit riders were courageous missionaries who rode the trails in the Old West, spreading the gospel wherever they could. These cowboys had guts! Some would go into Indian camps and others into wild mining camps just filled with folks that needed to get right with God. It was tough, dangerous work, but these circuit riders were filled with courage and boldness that came straight from God. It says in the Bible that ours is not a spirit of fear. Fear doesn’t come from God. But boldness does, and God must have given these guys a lot of it to face down arrows and guns just to spread the gospel. Next time you feel timid about standing up for God, remember those circuit riders, who risked death to make a difference in God’s kingdom.



*“David asked, ‘Is anyone left from the royal house of Saul? If there is, I want to be kind to him because of Jonathan.’” 2 Samuel 9:1 NIRV*

Nerdo, Calamity Jane, Cookie and I fell asleep pretty quickly, but Dusty and Black Bart stayed awake for one reason in particular that looking back now is pretty funny. There’s an old trick you play on camping buddies – in fact a lot of you probably know about this one. Black Bart and Dusty put shaving cream all over Nerdo’s hands while Nerdo slept. Then, Dusty tickled Nerdo’s nose with a feather and waited for Nerdo to start scratching that tickle. The end result was funny looking: Nerdo had shaving cream all over his face, but he was still asleep! Well, Black Bart and Dusty weren’t through. They put even more shaving cream on Nerdo’s hands and on the count of three, they yelled at the top of their lungs, “Rattlesnake!”

Nerdo jumped skyward and splatted that shaving cream all over himself. It would have been the funniest thing ever if I wasn’t so mad at the time.

“That’s enough of that. You boys get to sleep!” I hollered at Black Bart and Dusty. “That boy there saved my life from a rattlesnake and I’m not going to let you pick on him anymore.”

Black Bart and Dusty took the hint and stopped fooling around. In fact, they went right back to their sleeping bags and were snoozing pretty quick, just like the rest of us. Nerdo fell asleep last, after washing all that stuff off his face. He initially didn’t think he’d be able to sleep again, knowing those two were nearby and ready to pull a prank. But then he remembered that I was nearby and looking out him, so he slept well.

Ever heard of a guy named Mephibosheth? Don’t worry if you haven’t. He was in a similar story in your Bible. His dad was Jonathan, who once saved King David’s life. Well, Jonathan was gone, and some folks formed a posse and were out to do some harm to Mephibosheth. King David knew about this whole story and brought Mephibosheth to his place as soon as possible. Mephibosheth was pretty scared of the whole situation, but King David told him not to worry. He was safe and he’d even get to eat at the king’s table. You see, it wasn’t anything that Mephibosheth did. It was what his dad Jonathan did that protected him. Mighty interesting, isn’t it?

We’ve never done anything worth a hill of beans, but we’re all invited to the King’s table because of something someone else did for us. The King’s table is heaven, friends, and though all our works and good deeds will never get us through heaven’s front door, Jesus did something for all of us so we can get there. He gave his life for us. I don’t think any of us deserved that, but I sure am glad that God thought differently!



*“So I say, live by the Holy Spirit’s power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do.” Galatians 5:16 NIRV*

It was the middle of the night when Nerdo woke me up, only it wasn’t really Nerdo. It was someone who looked exactly like Nerdo! Confused? I sure was!

To make things perfectly clear, we found out that night that there happens to be a cattle rustler out there by the name of Mad Dog, who looks just like Nerdo!

“Freeze!” Mad Dog told us, holding up his guns. He and a few of his bandits were there to rob us of all our cows, but he stopped everything when he saw our friend Nerdo sitting there on his sleeping bag. It was a strange moment, I’ll tell you that. They looked at each other, and studied each other in amazement! It was like looking in the mirror! It was then at that moment that Nerdo realized the wanted poster didn’t have his picture on it after all. It had this bandit’s picture on it!

“Mad Dog?” Calamity Jane looked at Nerdo and said, “I knew that you looked like someone we knew.”

“Nerdo?” Dusty said. Then he looked at Nerdo and said, “You mean, you’re not Mad Dog?”

Dusty was stunned. So was Black Bart. In fact, everyone was so amazed at the two look-alikes that nobody noticed Cookie reaching down for his weapon. What was his weapon, you ask? Anyone who knows Cookie knows what his weapon is, folks. It’s beans! He’s the fastest bean-flicker this side of the Continental Divide. He launched a bean can fast as a Texas Tornado, one that knocked Mad Dog’s gun clear to Denver. And in seconds, Calamity Jane, Dusty, Black Bart and I were able to join in on the ruckus, with Cookie’s beans and bean cans flying everywhere. It was like a shooting gallery with bean cans, with us knocking guns and outlaws down left and right. We got a good advantage faster than you can say “Sufferin’ Succotash!”

Mad Dog knew it, and that’s why he decided to make an escape without the cows. But he did steal one very important item away from us: He took Nerdo!

What makes a guy like Mad Dog so mean? If you look at a photo of him – and then a photo of Nerdo – it would be hard to tell the difference. It isn’t the exterior that makes up a person. It is the inside, where the heart is. There’s a battle inside all of us where we have to decide to do right or wrong. Fortunately, there are ways to know you’re making good decisions. Read your Bible, go to church and be still to listen to God’s voice telling you what you should and shouldn’t do.

Finally, be careful not to judge others too quickly for making the wrong decisions. You yourself could be just one bad decision away from becoming a Mad Dog!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY TWENTY THREE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*"What do you think? Suppose a man owns 100 sheep and one of them wanders away. Won't he leave the 99 sheep on the hills? Won't he go and look for the one that wandered off?" Matthew 18:12-13 NIRV*

Mad Dog dragged Nerdo off into the darkness, barely escaping from the onslaught of flying baked beans. He didn't get to steal all those cows he wanted. Even worse, his gang of bandits was captured! But the night wasn't a total loss: He had Nerdo.

Those of you reading this might wonder what you're supposed to do with a Nerdo. To Mad Dog, the answer was simple: turn him in! As you may remember, there are a whole lot of wanted posters out there with Nerdo's picture on them. Of course, it is really Mad Dog's picture, but the two look so similar that no one would notice the difference until it was too late. You may ask another question: "Why would Mad Dog turn Nerdo in?" The answer is this: He wanted all that reward money!

As he marched Nerdo through the night desert, another happy thought flashed in Mad Dog's mind: "They'll put Nerdo in jail instead of me. Ha!"

Back at the camp, we were tying up bad guys and cleaning up after a big mess.

"We got to go after Nerdo," Calamity Jane said.

Cookie said something no one understood, but I'm guessing he was agreeing.

"I ain't going," Dusty said. "There's a little saying where I come from."

Black Bart asked him, "What's that, Dusty?"

Dusty then said, "He who turns and runs away, lives to turn and run away some other day."

"Are you yellow-bellied?" Black Bart blurted.

"I ain't scared, if that's what you're saying," Dusty explained. "It's just that Nerdo made us think he was someone he's not. I'm not going after him. He ain't worth it."

Black Bart scratched his chin a moment and looked like he was thinking deeply. Or, it could have been that he was experiencing some bad gas from eating beans. Either way, he said something profound afterwards.

"Dusty, I'm going after him. Driving these cattle, I've learned the importance of going after that one that is lost."

"Are you calling Nerdo a cow?" Dusty asked.

"No," Black Bart said, "But Nerdo is one of us. And I'm going after him. You stay here with the others and keep with the cows to protect them. Drive them on to ranch and I'll catch up with you."

"Are you crazy?" Dusty asked him.

"Just crazy enough," Black Bart said, and started to walk off into the darkness.

Of course, what Black Bart was doing was pretty brave. Mad Dog is the fastest draw I know of right now, and going after Nerdo is pretty dangerous. But Jesus left all the other sheep behind and went after that one lost sheep. Everyone is worth going after – even those who we think are hopeless lost causes. Even if there's a bit of risk involved. Never forget that Jesus thinks everyone is worth going after!





*“When pride comes, shame follows. But wisdom comes to those who are not proud.”  
Proverbs 11:2 NIRV*

Black Bart had a lot of enthusiasm, but not much skill when it came to tracking. It wasn't that he was ignorant. It was just that he didn't know anything! He wandered for days on horseback before realizing he wasn't exactly sure he was even heading in the right direction. There wasn't even anyone to stop and ask for directions, and Black Bart was beginning to feel like he was in trouble.

“I'm lost,” he muttered.

It is moments like these that you begin to value a little something called a map. Black Bart didn't have one, and was not quite sure which way to go from here. As he looked about at the desert landscape around him, he began to worry not so much about finding Nerdo anymore. Now he began to worry about himself!

“Howdy, stranger,” Calamity Jane said, from out of nowhere!

“Where did you come from?” Black Bart asked.

“I saw you were heading off to find Nerdo,” she responded, “so I thought I'd tag along and see if I could help. You know I'm a pretty good tracker.”

“You are?” he asked.

“Yup,” Calamity Jane answered. “You need any help?”

It was time for Black Bart to swallow his pride. If he didn't, he'd continue wandering out here lost in the desert. A lot of folks seem to have trouble swallowing pride. They wander around lost, thinking everything is okay – only the problem is they are getting more and more lost. Along comes someone like Calamity Jane with a simple offer to help, and many of us won't admit we need it. Some folks won't even go to church because they've got too much pride and think they're heading in the right direction. The problem with that is that they're only getting more and more lost with every step.

The first step to tackling a lot of our problems in life is swallowing our pride. Sure, it's a mouthful and probably doesn't taste that good going down. But like good medicine – which usually doesn't taste too good either – swallowing a good dose of pride on a regular basis is definitely good for you.

Black Bart must have thought this as well, because he turned to Calamity Jane and gave her a hearty, “Yes! I need help!”

It's a good thing he said that, because Calamity Jane was very helpful in getting the two of them on the right track. They followed Nerdo's trail all the way to a nearby town, where there was good news and bad news.

The good news was that they found Nerdo! The bad news was it looked like he was about to be hung from a noose for all of Mad Dog's crimes! Oh no!

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY TWENTY FIVE

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world. He sent His Son to save the world through Him.” John 3:17 NIRV*

“But I’m not Mad Dog,” Nerdo repeated to everyone around, but it didn’t seem to faze the large group of people there to watch the hanging. No one believed Nerdo because he looked exactly like that infamous outlaw Mad Dog. What a nightmare! As he looked down from the platform he was on, it really didn’t look like there was any way out for him.

As a noose slowly lowered around Nerdo’s neck, Black Bart and Calamity Jane desperately tried to figure out how to rescue Nerdo. Was this the end of our friend? How were they going to get down there and rescue him with all those people around?

BLAM! Suddenly, the sound of a gunshot filled the air! Instantly, the bullet snapped the rope around Nerdo’s neck, and just like that Nerdo was free from the hangman’s rope! Meanwhile, everyone ducked for fear of another gunshot!

“Where’d that shot come from?” Black Bart asked Calamity Jane.

“I don’t know,” she told him. “But we’d better get down there and help Nerdo.”

“It’s now or never,” Black Bart said, and the two of them rushed to their horses to help. But someone was already on his way to the rescue.

“Yee-haw!” Dusty hollered, as he rode his horse straight through the crowd.

Nerdo staggered to the edge of the gallows and watched the horse and rider approach him. Dusty was galloping wildly with people diving out of his way!

“Jump, Nerdo!” Dusty cried, and Nerdo quickly staggered off the edge of the gallows, landing squarely on the back of Dusty’s horse. The two of them then promptly galloped as fast as they could towards the town limits, where they ran into Calamity Jane and Black Bart.

“Dusty, I can’t believe you came back for Nerdo,” Black Bart said.

“No noose is good news,” Dusty laughed.

Dusty may be a couple enchiladas short of a combination platter, but he did say something wise there. A lot of folks call the gospel the Good News, and there’s a great reason for that. We avoided a death sentence just like Nerdo did because of a dramatic rescue. We were scheduled for a death we deserved, when all of the sudden: BLAM! Jesus charged into the picture and played the part of the greatest hero ever, rescuing each and every one of us from certain doom. You see, the Good News is no noose for us!

Back to our story: later, on the outskirts of town, the four of them had a chance to catch their breath. It was an exciting rescue, and there were smiles all around.

“I can’t believe you’re that good of a shot,” Calamity Jane said. “How’d you hit that rope, Dusty?”

“I didn’t,” Dusty admitted. “That shot came from Cowgirl Kate. She’s the best shot there is! I went and got help after you two left. I knew she could help us out.”

“Dusty, I thought you were trying to get away from Cowgirl Kate,” Black Bart told him, but then a smile covered his face. “You old softy. Where’s she at?”

“I don’t know,” Dusty admitted, “She was supposed to meet us up here.”

That’s just about when everyone realized something was definitely wrong.



## DAY TWENTY SIX

## TRAILBLAZERS

*"...The Lord your God will go with you. He will never leave you. He'll never desert you." Deuteronomy 31:6 NIRV*

"You looking for Cowgirl Kate?" a voice called out from a nearby building.

It was the voice of Mad Dog! Evidently, he hung around to watch Nerdo, and was disappointed there'd be no hanging. Now, he was determined to do the job himself.

"Oh no," Calamity Jane said, pointing at four figures stepping out from an old corral. "They've taken Cowgirl Kate hostage!"

Sure enough, there was Cowgirl Kate there. She was being held by none other than Wild Bill Hiccup and Wyatt Burp, those two rascals who tried robbing the train so long ago! And standing nearby was also a rabid-looking Mad Dog, just glaring at Nerdo.

"I'm calling you out, boy," Mad Dog said dramatically. "Me and you are gonna' have a duel. Mono a mono!"

"No thank you," Nerdo answered.

"Come out here and face me like a man," Mad Dog said. He pointed at Cowgirl Kate and threatened, "or your lady friend here gets it."

"Can't we do this some other way?" Nerdo pleaded with him.

"Like what?"

"I know!" Nerdo said. "Let's have a spelling contest!"

"Letters and such?" Mad Dog answered. "I ain't good with letters. But I am good with the six-gun. So get out here – and leave your friends there behind."

Nerdo did as instructed. He had no choice if he wanted to save the life of Cowgirl Kate. He walked away from the cover of safety where Dusty, Calamity Jane and Black Bart had been – and walked smack dab into the middle of the town street, facing off against the vicious Mad Dog.

"I don't have a gun," Nerdo said. "So I don't think I can duel you. Oh well!"

"Here! Take mine," Dusty said encouragingly, as he threw his gun and holster to Nerdo.

"Gee, thanks," Nerdo muttered ungratefully. He picked up the gun and studied it. He had never before used one in his life, and wasn't about to.

"Say when," Mad Dog barked at Nerdo, "and we'll draw. That's when we'll discover the quick ...and the dead."

Nerdo felt quite alone out there in the middle of the street, but it is important to say right now that when we make a stand for what's right, none of us will ever stand alone. The Bible says that God will never leave us or forsake us.

Nerdo remembered that scripture, but he wasn't quite sure what to do next. He sure as anything wasn't going to say the word "when!"

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY TWENTY SEVEN

## TRAILBLAZERS

*"The Lord doesn't save by using a sword or a spear. And everyone who is here will know it. The battle belongs to the Lord. He will hand all of you over to us." 1 Samuel 17:47 NIRV*

"You gonna draw or what?" Mad Dog said impatiently.

"You can't rush this moment," Nerdo stalled. "It's sacred. The time-honored tradition of the draw at high noon is a hallowed moment. It's special!"

"Just hurry up and (hic) draw already," Wild Bill Hiccup yelled from the side of the street.

"BURP!" said Wyatt Burp.

"You can do it, Nerdo," Dusty yelled.

"Yeah!" Black Bart said, not really believing himself.

This was it. The big show down with Mad Dog. Nerdo was beginning to feel as if he really was all alone out there. But the truth is that God is always behind us. In another famous showdown from the Bible, a young guy by the name of David faced off against a giant by the name of Goliath. By most accounts, the winner of this contest should have been a no-brainer: David was just a kid, and Goliath was a gigantic warrior. But what Goliath couldn't see was who was standing right with David in the time of battle. It was God, and that's why David rocked Goliath's world.

Staring Nerdo down, Mad Dog's expression changed ever so slightly at first. To begin with, there was steely resolve to gun Nerdo down. But then the change occurred. In mere moments, Mad Dog changed from a fierce outlaw to a man completely frozen with fear. Nerdo had no idea why, of course. He just snarled and looked mean.

"Aaaaaargh!" Mad Dog screamed, and then turned to run away.

Nerdo turned to look at the others and said, "I guess I showed him!"

That's when they all heard the rumble. And that's when they all figured out what it was that had so spooked Mad Dog. It wasn't Nerdo, that's for sure. It was something else behind Nerdo, and rapidly coming towards them!

"It's a stampede!" Black Bart said, pointing behind Nerdo, "and it's heading this way!" Like the worst thunderstorm you've ever heard, the out-of-control cattle came rushing through the town street knocking things over left and right. As runaway steer careened through the town, everyone made their way to higher ground in hopes they wouldn't get trampled. Wild Bill Hiccup and Wyatt Burp let go of Cowgirl Kate and ran for dear life as fast as they could. This left Dusty in a predicament, but he bravely darted through the dangerous bulls to get to Kate and rescue her. As the last of the cattle poured through the remaining outskirts of town, Nerdo, Black Bart, Dusty, Calamity Jane and Cowgirl Kate dusted off their jeans and laughed nervously about the close call.

You're probably wondering why a stampede would occur just at that time right there in town. Yes, it's odd, but not so strange when you realize they were in fact my cows and I know just the thing to do to spook them so they go into a stampede like that.

# KIDPAK ADVENTURES

## DAY TWENTY EIGHT

## TRAILBLAZERS

*“Peter came to Jesus. He asked, ‘Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times.’” Matthew 18:21-22 NIRV*

Yes, those were my cows that came through and saved the day. Cookie and I joined up with the others and together we rounded up all the cattle after they calmed down a bit. It took a lot of work, and afterwards we all stopped at the local soda fountain for a sarsaparilla. It was there that Nerdo heard a familiar voice it seemed he hadn't heard in ages.

“There you are!” said Professor Wisenheimer. “I've been looking all over for you, Nerdo.”

“Professor,” Nerdo shouted, hugging his friend. “Where have you been?”

“After the train stopped, I followed the train tracks back a bit with the help of some folks who are good at tracking,” Professor Wisenheimer started to explain. “They led us to an old mine.”

“That's our secret hide-out!” Dusty explained again. “It's an old abandoned mine that used to have gold in it.”

“Used to have gold?” Professor Wisenheimer repeated him. “Friend, you better take a closer look. I found some telltale signs that there is still plenty of gold in that hole. If only the original miners dug just a bit deeper.”

“You're kidding!” Dusty said, “We got to get back there! We'll be rich!”

“We can have the biggest mansions,” Black Bart started saying, but then he changed his course of thinking. “Dusty, we need to use the money to pay everyone back that we've ever robbed or done wrong to.”

“You're kidding,” Dusty said for the second time.

“No,” Black Bart said. “I think it is time we stopped being outlaws.”

“I couldn't agree more,” Cowgirl Kate said, grabbing Dusty's hand.

“Well,” Dusty announced, “it might take a while to pay everyone back, but I guess you're right. It's the proper thing to do.”

“You need to apologize too,” Professor Wisenheimer added.

“What?” Black Bart and Dusty said in unison.

“That's going too far!” Dusty objected.

“It is important to tell someone you're sorry for what you did,” Professor Wisenheimer told them. “And it is also important to let others know you forgive them if they've done you wrong. It sort of cleans the slate.”

“Professor's right,” Nerdo said. “In fact, if I ever see Mad Dog again, I'll forgive him. If God forgives us for all the rotten things we do, it's only natural that we should forgive each other.”

“It's settled then,” Dusty said. “Once we've helped move the cattle to the Lazy J Ranch, we'll go back to the hide-out. There may be something worth a whole lot in that gold mine, but having a clean heart is worth even more.”



*“You who are godly, be glad because of what the Lord has done. Praise Him, because His name is holy.” Psalm 97:12 NIRV*

The next day, it was time to say happy trails until we’d meet again. We knew we were going off in different directions, so we had one last big breakfast together and shared warmly with each other the different accounts of the adventure we had just been on. It certainly had been quite a time we shared, and there were points during our stories that Professor Wisenheimer had a difficult time believing! But, like I said at the beginning, this story is one hundred percent true. Well, most of it anyway.

Cookie made us some grub that consisted mainly of beans, but we said our blessing and thanked God for it nonetheless. No matter what situation you’re in, it is important to be thankful for what you have. Any attitude less than that is pretty ungrateful, especially considering the fact that there are those out there that have a whole lot less than you. So give thanks to God in all things, partner.

Besides, on this particular day we were especially thankful. This was simply because we were all alive and well. In fact, before Professor Wisenheimer and Nerdo got on the stagecoach to head back towards home, we all said a prayer to God, giving thanks for our protection during the crazy last few weeks we just had. It was a bittersweet goodbye, but we knew we’d all be seeing each other again sometime soon.

Professor Wisenheimer and Nerdo had to hop on a stagecoach to head towards the nearest railway station, while the rest of us stuck together to make sure the cattle got to the ranch safely. Mad Dog was still somewhere out there, but we were certain he wasn’t going to tangle with us again for a while.

All in all it was a great adventure in the wild, wild west. There were certainly times of great danger, but God was faithful in pulling us through. You see, as Nerdo learned, God is always behind us – and that’s something we should always be thankful for.



***TRAILBLAZERS***

# NOTES

