

A Journey to the Light

A Bible Study Guide and Companion to

**Cat Luker: The Swamp
Witch Chronicles**

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Witch Chronicles**

G. B. SOLLIE

Cross
Country



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Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of
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living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Seek God!

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: A Journey to the Light 1

Lesson #1 6

PROLOGUE — THE GREAT SNAKE

INTRODUCTION — A Journey to the Light

Lesson #2 10

CHAPTER ONE — THE DARE

CHAPTER TWO — AN UNWANTED VISITOR

Lesson #3 20

CHAPTER THREE — A STRANGE STORM

CHAPTER FOUR — THE PROMISE

Lesson #4 30

CHAPTER FIVE — THE SPELL BOOK

CHAPTER SIX — FRENCH GHOSTS

Lesson #5 42

CHAPTER SEVEN — THE TEDDY BEAR RIDDLE

CHAPTER EIGHT — GHOST TOWN TRIP

Lesson #6 54

CHAPTER NINE — SLEEPWALKING

CHAPTER TEN — GOOD GHOSTS

Lesson #7 64

CHAPTER ELEVEN — THE TIME TRAVELERS

CHAPTER TWELVE — HALLOWEEN PARTY

Lesson #8 78

CHAPTER THIRTEEN — A MUFFIN IN THE CIRCUS

CHAPTER FOURTEEN — TUBBY & MUFFINS

Lesson #9 90

CHAPTER FIFTEEN — THE RINGMASTER'S TENT

CHAPTER SIXTEEN — HAUNTED HOUSE BATTLE

Lesson #10..... 102

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN — RELIANT AND DEFIANT

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN — THE DARK CLOCK

CONCLUSION: A Journey to the Light..... 114

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Bible Study Guide for *Cat Luker: The Swamp Witch Chronicles*, the first book, *The Dark Clock*, in the *Cat Luker* Christian Fantasy series.

Let me warn you: this is not a typical Bible study guide! Here, you will need to use your imagination and place yourself in the characters' shoes. As you do, you will be faced with situations that might be scary and confusing. Your mission is to grasp the Christian symbolism and opportunities for understanding and relate them to your life's journey. Those that do will thrive!

I love to read. I've enjoyed many adventures in my life—through the books I've read—and they have inspired me and given me confidence and courage to take daring steps in my real life. For example, the book *The Hobbit* begins with a step into an adventure. That is how life works: you have to take that first step.

From a very young age, I wanted to read the Bible from front to back. I tried a few times, but I inevitably ran out of steam. I had not prepared myself for the journey. I did not realize that I needed to do more than read; I needed to seek God. What a wonderful life it has been since then.

As you go through this Guide, please realize that you are seeking God.

Did you know that the Bible is filled with fantastic creatures? From giants and terrifying cherubim to leviathan sea monsters and dragons, not to mention witchcraft, wizards, and magicians, the Bible is rich with strange and amazing characters. You will find that amazing characters will appear in your life as well—and not all will be fantastic. The world is filled with good and evil. At some point in your life, you will have to confront evil and make decisions about what action you want to take to deal with it. It's a good idea to surround yourself with those things that might help you face these situations—friends, family, scripture, education, and good habits. Many excellent examples of these are illustrated in this book, but they are not always obvious. So, be on the lookout!



The people that were the inspiration for *Cat Luker: The Swamp Witch Chronicles* grew up in the Great Depression of the 1930s, an extremely difficult period of time in America. It was even more difficult in the rural South, where times had already been hard. Without jobs or much money, people had to live off the land, raise their own food, and make things by hand. The children had to use their imaginations to entertain themselves—and going on adventures was a popular option. When those children grew into adulthood, they became known as the Greatest Generation because of the many difficulties they had overcome. It is clear that God was with them, and they prospered, but it was not easy. There are lessons to be learned

from these strong souls. They built their lives on a foundation of faith, with seven foundational elements:

- Courage—Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The courage to believe.
- Focused discipline—Hard work, patience, perseverance, and self-control. The discipline to seek God.
- Honesty—Integrity, fairness, trust, and truthfulness.
- The value of freedom—Understanding and appreciating their Bill of Rights.
- Personal responsibility—Being a good team player. Owning up.
- Ambitious ingenuity—Taking risks, trying to grow, and being creative. Using their God-given talents.
- Love-based compassion—Embracing the teachings of Jesus. Standing up for others.

These are attributes we should all embrace and strive for.

Aimwell, the town where *Cat Luker* is set, is a real place. Many now call it “God’s Country,” but back then, evil was at work there, trying to destroy what God had made. The area’s history is amazing—so much so that it is sometimes hard to tell where the history ends and the fantasy begins. But you will discover that as you take the journey!

In this fictional story, Cat Luker, the title character, and her two closest friends, Little Preacher and Jane Alice, lead the journey to the light and the battle to save Aimwell. But the characters are inspired by real people in real life. Their names and nicknames stuck with them, and although some of their exploits in this story are fictitious, their lives were equally astonishing.

As I've asked you to be mindful of seeking God as you work through this Guide, know that the real-life Cat and Little Preacher remained faithful to that practice for as long as they lived. I got to see it firsthand, since they were my parents. And they made an amazing difference in this world, and I know you can as well.

God be with you!

Note: If you are reading this on a device, grab a pen and paper!

LESSON #1



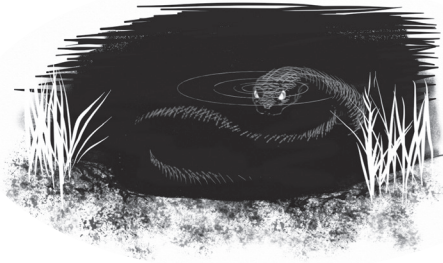
READING ASSIGNMENT:

Before starting this lesson, read PROLOGUE —
THE GREAT SNAKE in *Cat Luker: The Swamp Witch
Chronicles* and the Introduction to this Bible Study Guide



PROLOGUE THE GREAT SNAKE

Before the story of *The Swamp Witch Chronicles* begins, the Prologue makes it clear that there is evil in the story and, symbolically, in this world. The Great Snake is introduced in a fashion similar to the introduction of the serpent in Genesis. In Genesis 3:14, after the serpent tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and then gave it to Adam, the Lord confronted the serpent.



*And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou
hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and
above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou
go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.*

Genesis 3:14

The swamp in the story reflects the Garden of Eden after the fall of man, when Adam and Eve lost their innocence. The Great Snake rules now. The swamp is just the opposite of the garden. It represents all the world's evil; it is the opposite of a place of peace and beauty. The Swamp Witch, still a child in the Prologue, grows into a great evil in her own right and is one of the Great Snake's followers.

In the Prologue, the Swamp Witch's mother tries to sacrifice her to the Great Snake, but the Great Snake tricks the mother and the child. In the world, when evil took root after the fall, it was not uncommon for people to sacrifice their children to pagan gods. Molech is a Canaanite god associated with child sacrifice—also known as Baal. The servants of Molech sought favor this way. The laws given to Moses by God forbade Jews to practice this ritual.

*And thou shalt not let any of thy children pass
through the fire to Molech.*

Leviticus 18:21

God was clearly against child sacrifice, but He asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac!

*And it came to pass after these things, that God did
tempt Abraham,
And said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold,
here I am.
And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac,
whom thou lovest and get thee into the land of
Moriab; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon
one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

Genesis 2:1-2

This was a test of Abraham's faith and a clear prophecy of Jesus, the Lamb of God, coming to die for the sins of mankind. God provided his Son, Jesus. Abraham was prepared to provide Isaac. Both Jesus and Isaac carried the instruments of their death—a cross and a bundle of firewood—on their backs up a mountain to be sacrificed. In the end, God provided Abraham with a ram instead of Isaac, and scripture shows that Abraham knew God's goodness would prevail. But Jesus died for our sins and served as our substitute to give us everlasting life.

Symbolism is used throughout the Bible to communicate important principles and to point to the future—to the coming of Jesus, the Promised One. Before we begin to study the main story, our journey to the light, let's review a few important points and questions.

REVIEW

Points from Reading Assignment:

1. In all things, we should _____ God.
2. There are _____ and _____ in the world.
3. _____ is used throughout the Bible.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Is the serpent Satan in the Book of Genesis in the Bible or is it in the Prologue of the book? Or is Satan manipulating the serpent(s) for his purpose? Explain your answer:

2. What are other symbolic ways that God promised to send Jesus in the Old Testament?

3. Abraham's faith was tested. How has your faith been tested?

LESSON #2



READING ASSIGNMENT:

CHAPTER ONE —THE DARE

and

CHAPTER TWO — AN UNWANTED VISITOR



CHAPTER ONE THE DARE

Now, let's jump to the New Testament.

Chapter One of *Cat Luker* starts with a vaguely familiar introduction: “Many have tried...” This is a nod to the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 1, Verses 1-4. To me, Luke is the most beautiful gospel; it tells the story of Jesus like none other. This beginning of the chapter is also a testament to Catherine (Cat), who gave her life to Jesus with her whole heart.

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke 1: 1-4

Here it is in the chapter:



Many have tried to record what happened in that God-forsaken swamp, just as it was handed down from the beginning by those with firsthand knowledge. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything, it seemed a good idea for me to write an orderly account for you, most dear Catherine. My prayer is that others may know with certainty the wondrous things that you have done for your beloved.

Cat's "beloved" is Jesus, followed closely by Little Preacher and Cat's family. Luke's beloved is also Jesus, and he goes to great pains to tell the story of the Son of God. In both cases, these stories border on being hard to believe. In today's terms, you have to dive deep to fully understand.

Chapter One sets the stage for what is to follow. After being introduced to Cat, her friends, her family, and the story's setting, you learn that Cat faces a dare that will change her life forever. As the Luke-styled preamble indicates, the God-forsaken swamp is waiting. This is a reminder that there is evil in this world, and you never know what circumstances might put you face-to-face with the dark side.

In Cat's case, a simple dare from her brothers ignites her pride and anger (two of the seven deadly sins) and plunges her into a battle for life itself!

Cat is gifted with a variety of unique qualities—speed, keen eyesight, amazing artistic abilities, the power to speak with animals, and visions that defied understanding, among others. In Biblical times, Jesus demonstrated his own amazing abilities and, in turn, gifted his disciples to perform miracles. In modern times, God has gifted people with great skills and capabilities that fit their purpose in life, such being a doctor, musician, inventor, athlete, or other profession. All gifts can be used for good or evil. Satan has been known to tempt people and to use their gifts—and their ego—as a lever to manipulate them into doing things that are not good. To choose to use one’s gifts for the good of mankind instead of using them for selfish gain is an indication of great character.

Still, even with all of her gifts, Cat finds herself nearly trapped in the clutches of evil as the Swamp Witch plots to capture her in the cottage. But Cat escapes.



She was running so fast and was so scared that she didn’t realize she was gripping the witch’s hat in her hand. Then reality set in, and she smiled. *I have proof!* she thought, and she jumped in the air, thrusting the hat over her head in celebration. She couldn’t help but think of the verse Little Preacher had told her:

Let the wicked fall into their own net, while I escape!

Psalms 141:10

This verse rings true through the ages and should serve as a warning whenever wicked temptation creeps into your life. Be on guard because, as another valuable verse points out:

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

CHAPTER TWO

AN UNWANTED VISITOR

Trouble sometimes comes looking for us. Don't doubt for a minute that Satan can send trouble in your direction in the form of temptation, greed, or any number of other tricks that might be disguised, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, as good. But when the Swamp Witch boldly invades Cat's space, there's no trickery; it is just a full-on assault! Cat isn't expecting the visit, and she isn't prepared for it, either. Her "Holy Water" is not in place to help her defend herself.

There is a lesson here. Knowing you will face the enemy at some point in your life, you need to be prepared. It's no different from making plans in case a tornado hits your home, a fire breaks out, or any number of other possible disasters strike. You need a plan. And you need to put things in place to support the plan. Think about it as "spiritual warfare"—you are fighting for your spiritual life. That is what Cat does as she motivates Little Preacher and Jane Alice to prepare to confront the threat of the Swamp Witch.

But Cat isn't content to be passive and just put things in place to defend herself. She wants to go on the offensive and

remove the threat altogether, and she believes that the Swamp Witch's power comes from her spell book.

It's important to note that Cat doesn't try to "go it alone" in this situation. She wants to form a Christian alliance to solve the problem. That's a lesson for all of us, as well; we should never hesitate to reach out for help when we're confronted with problems, large or small. As the saying goes, two heads are better than one. The Bible advises:

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Matthew 18:20

In other words, the more the merrier. But it is even better to bring Jesus into the circle to guide decision-making. Cat, Jane Alice, and Little Preacher put their heads together and pray for guidance. Once they do that, they receive the message that they need to act boldly in the face of evil. Of course, Cat is the one that delivers the message, but it takes some arm-twisting to convince her friends:



After thanking Little Preacher for the tenth time, Cat took the lead. "After the Swamp Witch came into my room, I was scared to death, but when I woke up the next morning and prayed about it, I felt a calm peace come over me. I knew it was time to act. We can't sit here and let the Swamp Witch attack Aimwell and the church and destroy Christmas in the process. We need to go on the offensive and try to take her spell book away from her because I think that's the source of her power. We need a plan!"

Sometimes it's hard to determine what God wants you to do. That's not because God doesn't have a clear message; it's because we often have our own agendas. We want God to tell us what we want to hear, not the hard truth, which can be painful. On top of that, our confusion can be multiplied in a group setting. Don't be surprised if sometimes it takes days or weeks of prayer and discussion to feel that you've clearly gotten a message. But once you do, it's time to act. You might make mistakes, you might stumble, and you might still be confused and scared, but if you move forward, God will be with you.

REVIEW

Points from Chapter One:

1. The devil prowls like a _____.
2. Let the _____ fall into their own net.
3. Cat's beloved is _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Do you think God places people in certain situations to move them in the direction he wants them to go? The “dare” Cat’s brothers gave her is an example. Have you had that experience? Write about it.

2. Great personal gifts sometimes seemingly appear at birth, while sometimes they take time to develop in a person. Do you have gifts that could positively impact the world? Spoiler alert: We all do! What dreams like that do you have?

3. Have you ever tried to play a trick on someone, but it backfired? What happened? How did the Swamp Witch's plans backfire on her?

Points from Chapter Two:

1. Sometimes _____ comes looking for you.
2. When disaster strikes, you should already have a _____.
3. Sometimes it is hard to determine what _____ would have you do.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Have you ever found yourself unprepared to face the enemy?

2. Cat and her friends are engaged in “spiritual warfare” as they battle the Swamp Witch. Do some Biblical research in Ephesians and document the full armor of God. What is spiritual warfare, and what weapons are needed for it?

3. Matthew 18:20 says: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” What does that mean to you? What does it mean in the context of its surrounding verses?

NOTES:

LESSON #3



READING ASSIGNMENT:

CHAPTER THREE — A STRANGE STORM
and
CHAPTER FOUR — THE PROMISE



CHAPTER THREE A STRANGE STORM

Have you ever heard the expression “Loose lips sink ships”? It is an American English idiom meaning “beware of unguarded talk.” The saying first appeared on propaganda posters during World War II. As Chapter Three begins, we have an example of this:



The bluebirds liked to talk, and the vultures liked to listen.

Unguarded talk can lead to problems. In Cat’s case, the bluebirds tip off the Swamp Witch (with the vultures’ help) that she wants to try and take the witch’s spell book! This enables the Swamp Witch to prepare for the attack, and Cat and her friends are in danger once again.

In our lives, unguarded talk can take many forms, and they are not always good. For example, gossip is a type of unguarded talk that can cause harm to others. The bluebirds are essentially

gossiping about something they had overheard and don't realize doing so could cause problems. Another example of unguarded talk is when someone takes you into their confidence and shares a problem with you. They trust you not to talk to others about what they have shared. If you break that trust by casually discussing it with others, you could cause damage. On the other hand, if you discern that the person who shared the information needs more help than you can provide, you should bring it to the attention of a trusted adult with the authority to step in and help. Handling confidential information properly is a critical life skill that needs to be taken seriously.

Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Psalms 141:3

In the swamp, the Swamp Witch is a force to be reckoned with. She controls all manner of creatures as well as the forces of nature to some degree. But on the surface, she appears to be a weak old hag, barely getting by. Evil is like that; It's not always obvious what you're dealing with.

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:14

As the chapter title suggests, a strange storm can sometimes appear in your life. It can happen for any number of reasons that you're often not aware of. What matters is how you respond to the situation.



“This way!” yelled Cat, grabbing Jane Alice’s hand. They headed away from the storm, moving as fast as they could run.

Cat follows her instincts and moves quickly to avoid the danger. You can’t allow yourself to crumple into a paralyzed heap on the ground when alligators are trying to eat you! Hopefully, you will never have that experience. Still, danger takes many forms, and the same principle applies: You have to take action and keep your wits about you. Keeping your mind clear and functional and your body strong and healthy goes hand in hand with being prepared for these types of situations.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

Ephesians 6:10-11

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROMISE

“I continued to make tents.” This is an expression that you should burn into your mind and never forget! It will help you get through the times in your life that might seem boring or without purpose. Chapter Four starts with a segment from a sermon that Little Preacher’s father is sharing with him. After his conversion on the Road to Damascus, Paul went on to write most of the New Testament, but he also continued

to live his life. He was a tentmaker by trade. To use a more modern expression, that was his “day job” as he helped lay the foundation for Christianity. But he was able to use the time of peaceful craftsmanship for prayer and thought on his greater mission.



It was a sweeter existence than I deserved, and I was thankful. It also allowed me time to think and ponder why. I realized that what I knew with certainty most others would struggle to believe.

The point of Preacher Sollie’s sermon was to remind the congregation that they should live life as a continuous worship service—seven days a week, and not just on Sunday! God will channel his power to us around the clock if we let Him. The fact is, we all have to “make tents” in one form or another, but we can demonstrate our faith in God in the process.

Also in this chapter, we begin to see Grand Paw Sam emerge as a positive force in the lives of Little Preacher, Cat, and Jane Alice. They are drawn to him because he tries to improve their lives. He becomes a trusted-adult figure, a guide, so to speak, that they can depend on when needed. He is a man with a good heart and a wealth of knowledge and experience who works to give back to his community.

This is a life lesson to consider as you look to the future: Seek good counsel on what stretches before you. There is great value in Godly advice.

*With the ancient is wisdom: and in length of days
understanding.*

Job 12:12

The Foundational Issue of Creation

One aspect of true understanding is an absolute belief in God. Most of us say that we believe, but we also occasionally lose our focus on His existence. Try the exercise that Little Preacher shares with Cat and Jane Alice as they lie there, looking up at the stars on The Hill. Wait for a clear night and find an unobstructed view of the heavens. Lie on your back with other friends and discuss the wonders of God's creation as a first step. It's the second step—trying to imagine what was in place before creation—that's the most difficult!

The concept of creation, as it is spelled out in Genesis, is well known and generally understood:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Since this is the very first sentence of the Bible, it must be pretty important! Let's not gloss over this too quickly. In this exercise—and this is not easy—try and imagine absolute nothingness. Ask yourself: How did anything come to exist at all? Most of us take for granted that there have always been *things*—things around us, things in our minds. Sure, if we look around us, we see that we have solid ground below our feet, air to breathe, stars in the sky, food to eat, and so forth. But how did all this come about? Were they always here?

Extend the exercise: Take a moment and imagine you can roll up all the things in the infinite universe into a tiny ball and put the ball in your pocket. Cover your eyes to block out all the light. Be in total darkness. Don't make a sound. Now, pretend

you don't exist. Nothing exists. Then, take a few minutes to lie there in silence, with your eyes closed, making no sounds, asking God: "How did You do this?"

Atheists who strictly believe in evolution and point to the Big Bang Theory as the answer don't start with *zero* material. They live in a world that they can't fully explain. How does anyone explain the origin of the universe without God? On the other hand, Christians accept a God that they can't fully understand, and the origin of the universe is explained.

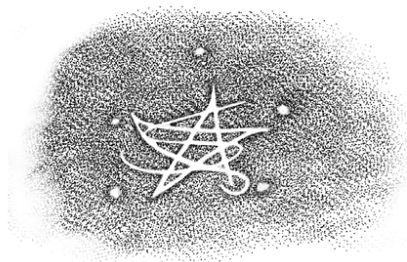
From our friends at Wikipedia: "One of the common misconceptions about the Big Bang model is that it fully explains the origin of the universe. However, the Big Bang model does not describe how energy, time, and space were caused."

Little Preacher summed up his hilltop sermon:



...so If I REMEMBER; nothing exists without God, and with God all things are possible, my faith is made stronger!

Little Preacher's message resonated with Cat as she struggled to deal with the evil that had entered her life. She was inspired to suggest they create a Faith Star as a symbolic reminder of God's Promise.



It is extremely easy to forget about God's power and presence in difficult times. Our faith can falter, and we can wonder if God is with us. We can sometimes even doubt that He exists.

From the beginning, God knew that we would struggle with unbelief, and he provided words of assurance to us in the Bible. Christian symbols can point you back to the Word and act as a reminder to have faith and to continuously seek God. When Cat created her Faith Star, it was to help remind her and her friends of Little Preacher's words: "If-I REMEMBER; nothing exists without God, and with God all things are possible, my faith is made stronger!"

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

As Chapter Four closes, Cat needs all the reminders and reassurance she can muster to keep her friends on board with the plan. Their enthusiasm for going to the store is replaced by the cold realization that they are one step closer to doing the unthinkable.

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Three:

1. Loose lips sink _____.
2. For even _____ disguises himself.
3. Sometimes a _____ will appear in your life.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Psalms 141:3 says:“Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.” Have you ever wished you had a guard over your mouth? Please explain—without causing additional problems!

2. Those who crossed paths with the Swamp Witch at the swamp’s edge thought she was a helpless old hag. Have you ever encountered someone or something that was not really as it appeared—good or bad?

3. Keeping your mind clear and functional and your body strong and healthy go hand in hand with being prepared for demanding situations. What does that mean to you, and how do you accomplish that goal?

Points from Chapter Four:

1. I continued to make _____.
2. With the ancient is _____: and in length of days _____.
3. If-I _____ that nothing exists without God and, with God, all things are possible, then our faith is made stronger.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) Why do you think this is the first verse of the Bible? Read the first five verses of Genesis before you answer the question.

2. One of the common misconceptions about the Big Bang model is that it fully explains the origin of the universe. However, the Big Bang model does not describe how energy, time, and space were caused. Do scientific details about the universe's complexity make you believe *more* or *less* in God? Explain. Remember that we can't fathom the power and peace of God—it exceeds all understanding!

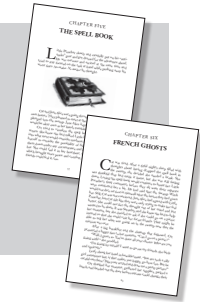
3. From the beginning, God knew that we would struggle with unbelief, and He provided words of assurance to us in the Bible. Physical religious symbols also help remind and assure us that God is with us on a daily basis. Can you describe Cat's Faith Star symbol and her logic behind creating it?

LESSON #4



READING ASSIGNMENT:

CHAPTER FIVE — THE SPELL BOOK
and
CHAPTER SIX — FRENCH GHOSTS



CHAPTER FIVE THE SPELL BOOK

After Little Preacher, Jane Alice, and Cat experience their intense period of prayer and spiritual awakening, they turn their attention to the mission of capturing the spell book from the Swamp Witch. That's the prize they seek, so they try to visualize a positive result. But it becomes difficult for them to keep their thoughts from drifting into fear and anxiety. They can't help but second-guess themselves and have doubts about what they're trying to accomplish.



Life's mental battles are sometimes more difficult than its physical battles. Satan can twist our thoughts and place stumbling blocks in our path (note the vulture that Jane Alice saw at the side of the road) that stall progress and even kill good intentions. In Cat's case, she sees her friends starting to waver in unbelief as if they don't share her conviction that what they're doing is the will of God.

But at that critical moment, Cat's conviction wins them over, and they move forward. Sometimes in life, you have to choose—left or right, yes or no, up or down, forward or backward, go or stay, belief or unbelief. Whatever your choice, having a personal relationship with God and a sturdy foundation of belief and understanding can help you make the right decision about which step to take, big or small. Also, know that God will test you!

Tests come in all shapes and sizes in life and at the least expected time; what is important is how you deal with them in the moment. Hopefully, you will not be faced with an army of spiders in the swamp and a spider web fence! The Bible says:

David also said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.

1 Chronicles 28:20

There are many, many stories and examples of characters in the Bible who struggled with what God wanted them to do. So don't feel alone in that regard, but learn from them and seek understanding. Understanding is especially important:

Always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

2 Timothy 3:7

Don't simply seek to learn these Bible stories; work to recognize and understand the truth. Don't be swayed by false interpretations. The truth is the truth.

The pivotal moment in this chapter is when Cat is trapped inside the cottage as all hope is apparently lost, and she makes the decision to turn evil (the spell book) into good (escape).



“Look, we might be able to turn this spell book into something good instead of something evil. Maybe we can turn her evil snare into a trap for her like the Good Book says, but we’ll need all the fixings to make it work. We’ll put the Swamp Witch in the closet and barricade the door when we’re done.”

The “truth” in this instance is channeled through Cat!



“Stop with the questions!” Cat exclaimed. “I am trying to figure out how to get us out of this mess! And no, I don’t know what that will be yet. And yes, I can read this, barely! And no! We probably should not be looking at this book, but I bet the Lord would rather we use the Swamp Witch’s power against her than be eaten by those spiders! Now hush! Give me a minute to think.”

In the end, the group makes it out of the cottage as eagles and escape the spiders—and the Swamp Witch! But the spell book gets lost in the process. Symbolically, they fly back to the cross and perch on the church steeple. It is time to lick their wounds and regroup.



“You know, Little Preacher, I think you’re right. We don’t have anything to be ashamed of. We did our best, and it wasn’t a bad first effort to stop the Swamp Witch!” Jane Alice added.

“Darn right!” Cat responded, feeling better by the minute. “Let’s enjoy the flight home. First one there gets to land on the church steeple!”

Try to remember that things are not always successful the first time, but it’s worth trying again!

For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.

1 Thessalonians 2:18



CHAPTER SIX

FRENCH GHOSTS

On the heels of the spell book mission, Cat is still feeling down about having lost her grip on the spell book. She can't get out of her mind the image of the book plummeting into the swamp. Her friends try to cheer her up, and she tries to look on the bright side, but she can't shake the feeling that the Swamp Witch will find it and will come back to haunt them.

We all have things that haunt us and worry us over a long period of time. And Cat has a right to be concerned. She knows the Swamp Witch is powerful and is on a mission. Chapter Six brings another element to the haunting: the French ghosts.

As the chapter begins, Cat decides she needs to go on a picnic. She gets permission from her mother and sets up her picnic on a big flat rock in the meadow where she can enjoy the sunshine. It is perfect—until an intruder appears.

Have you ever “judged a book by its cover” or misjudged someone? The saying, “Don't judge a book by its cover,” guides us to be careful not to judge someone simply by what we see on the outside or what we perceive something to be.

As Cat worries about the future and wonders if the Swamp Witch might try to retaliate, she spies a big, black cat stalking her from the edge of the woods and almost judges a book by its cover:



In the back of her mind, she wondered if the Swamp Witch had sent the evil creature to get revenge. Cat knew the black cat was fast. She knew if she turned to run, it would catch up with her quickly, so it took all her willpower to hold her position. She didn't like the thought of a black cat jumping on her back if she turned to run. She wanted to fight him face-to-face. So, she stood on the rock and turned to face him. The black cat crept up and leaped on top of the rock, an arm's length away, looking at her.

In the Bible, God makes it clear to Samuel how people should be judged.

But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

Thankfully for Cat, she gives the big black cat a chance to introduce himself.



Cat looked at him and decided to ask him a question. "Do you plan to hurt me?" she stammered. "Are you intending to harm me?" He chuckled. "No! I intend to be your friend."

Thus begins a relationship between Cat and King Black that would change their lives forever and for the better. To Cat, King Black is truly a gift from God.

Cat asks King Black to keep an eye on things in the swamp so they can know what the Swamp Witch is doing. King Black is perfect for such an assignment, and he takes it to heart. This leads to the discovery of the French ghost pirates.

There are two more sayings to consider.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor.

Ecclesiastes 4:9

And:

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

In other words, if you want to be successful in life, surround yourself with good people. Build a team you can count on. That's what Cat does as she faces her challenge.

There is a lot of activity in Chapter Six, and Cat needs all the help she can get to keep on top of things. To further illustrate the above Bible verses, we notice that each of Cat's friends in the story play a role in helping out. King Black, in spy mode, discovers the French ghosts and is able to show them to Cat. Jane Alice is able to leverage a family trip to Demopolis to explore the old cemetery by the river and gather names from the tombs. She even encounters a ghost pirate! Little Preacher uses his research abilities to make sense of all they discovered.

Through the team's collective efforts and by sharing their notes in the secret room in the church, they are able to plot their next move. The idea that the Swamp Witch is older than they can imagine and that she has a team of her own—including the Great Snake, The Evil, and now, the French ghost pirates—makes them realize they are facing something much bigger than an old hag in a swamp.



REVIEW

Points from Chapter Five:

1. We all have the potential to waver in _____.
2. The truth is the _____.
3. Try and remember that things are not always _____ the first time.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Have you ever felt that Satan placed a stumbling block in your path as you tried to accomplish something? Please explain.

2. Do you think that courage is required as a Christian? What happens when you lack courage in a situation?

3. What does this phrase mean to you: “Always learning but never coming to a full understanding of the truth”?

Points from Chapter Six:

1. Don't judge a book by its _____.
2. The Lord looks on the _____.
3. A cord of three strands is not quickly _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. We all have examples of things that “haunt” us and worry us over an extended period of time. Share an example from your life:

2. Have you ever encountered someone that turned out to be different than what you expected when you first met them? Yes or No. Please explain.

3. Are you skeptical by nature, or do you tend to give people the benefit of the doubt? How does that impact your ability (positive or negative) to establish strong “cords” of friendship? What does the Bible say about this?

NOTES:

LESSON #5



READING ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTER SEVEN — THE TEDDY BEAR RIDDLE and CHAPTER EIGHT — GHOST TOWN TRIP



CHAPTER SEVEN THE TEDDY BEAR RIDDLE

Cat, Little Preacher, and Jane Alice consider the church's secret room a safe place for them. They can retreat there, regroup, and know they are protected in that sanctuary from the outside world. They can share their innermost thoughts and feelings with trusted friends and know they will be supported with unconditional love.

We all need a safe place to go when things get tough, right? We all need a “secret room” where we can gather with trusted friends. Small groups in church are like that. It has been said that God is a “small group”— God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—working in perfect unison. From the beginning, the Bible says:

And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him helper suitable for him.

Genesis 2:18

Think about building a “secret room” and a network of friends in your life. It should be part of your foundation as a Christian. In the early years of the church—and even now in some parts of the world—small groups of Christians had to meet in secrecy to avoid persecution. Remember, “the ways of the world” are not always God’s way. Don’t be afraid to “buck the system” if you see something being done that is not right. Lean on your small group for support in that process.

The Lord rewards those who are faithful and righteous.

1 Samuel 26:23

Dreams can be disturbing, and they can be another reason to lean on your small group!

Cat has a dream (or is it real?) that starts with a sweet teddy bear, and she has to share it with her friends. The phrase, BEFORE TIME, echoes in her mind and becomes a riddle for the group to think about and try to solve.



Little Preacher was thinking about it and started rubbing his chin.

“Let’s go up on The Hill,” he said, “and consider what this riddle means. It is a good, peaceful spot to think about stuff, and Lord knows we could use some peace right now.”

And then, after they make it to The Spot:



Little Preacher said, “You know what? Daddy told me that whenever you have a dream like that, you need to really think about, you know, if it was a dream or a nightmare, or if it really happened. You need to really think about what God is trying to tell you. He may be trying to tell you something, Cat. You need to really think about it.

“Close your eyes, Cat, and Jane Alice, you close your eyes, too,” he continued. They held hands on both sides of Little Preacher. “We are going to think about what BEFORE TIME means.”

As we have discussed, it is almost impossible to wrap our minds around the idea of creation and what things were like before God created heaven and Earth. Essentially, what we are trying to imagine is BEFORE TIME. Cat adds to the mystery when she shares another detail:



Cat broke the silence. “I’m not sure if I was dreaming last night. I saw a dark silhouette that was turning slowly in the void. It seemed like there was something out there!”

Sometimes history collides with history from two vastly different parts of the world (or the universe!), and it becomes

difficult to separate fact from fiction. In fact, historical facts are sometimes stranger than fiction. You have to wonder if God's hand is not at work in a physical place in time when things happen that almost defy reason.

Case in point: Napoleon promoted a family member, Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes, to Count of the Empire in France. He was also a general commanding the Imperial Guard. Remember that this was France, built by King Louis XIV, who ruled from his great palace at Versailles. Napoleon seized power in 1799 and was forced from power in 1814. A few years later, Charles and a group of Napoleon's inner circle formed a colony in Marengo County, Alabama, hoping to re-create their French way of life. What are the odds of that taking place?

As Cat and her friends seek to understand what is happening around them, and as Cat is aware of Little Preacher's ability to do research, she turns to him to seek the facts.

The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

Proverbs 18:15

Life is a great adventure, and, to make the most of it, you need to surround yourself with a small group of trusted friends with whom you can share ideas, acquire knowledge, and build a foundation for the future. You never know what history and the future have in store.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GHOST TOWN TRIP

The adventure continues. Cat and Jane Alice start plotting how they can get to the ghost town of Aigleville. (By the way, Aigleville is and was a real place. It is listed as a ghost town in Alabama!) Cat feels moved to go there to gain a better understanding of the Swamp Witch and what she and her friends are dealing with. She believes God is directing her steps in the same way that Jeremiah described to the Israelites.

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:11-13

Cat is seeking God with all her heart and is trying to confront a threat that the Lord equipped her to deal with. What she wants to do requires courage, effort, some planning, and thought on her part, but she is motivated to accomplish her goal.

Don't let hurdles stop you from reaching the goals you believe in with all your heart, the ones that God would have you reach. Sometimes it's easy to believe that we can't accomplish certain things because we are not “good” at this or that, but, in reality, we are making excuses to avoid effort and hard work! Don't trick yourself or allow Satan to trick you into thinking that you have limited abilities.

Also, don't be afraid to ask for help or seek guidance from someone with more experience than you have. That is part of the learning process. Always keep in mind that, even though you might not know everything, you can know where to look for the information. Also, realize that God gifts people with different abilities; your ability to recognize those gifts in others is a sign of leadership. Cat, for example, recognizes that Jane Alice has a practical side to her and seeks her opinion about the ghost town trip.



She couldn't help but offer a practical perspective. "Cat, we need an adult to take us. Our parents will not let us go alone, and we need an automobile or at least a wagon to make the trip. It's too far for us to walk."

"But who?" Cat asked.

Jane Alice paused. "Grand Paw Sam is our best bet."

Cat smiled, "I like that thought, Sweet-tater!"

Cat effectively executes a double play from a leadership standpoint—she leverages the abilities of her trusted friend, Jane Alice, and she finds the perfect solution to the problem in Grand Paw Sam, a person of great knowledge and experience, and the guide they need.

Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.

Proverbs 16:31

(By the way, if someone calls you "Sweet-tater," consider it a high compliment!)

As expected, Grand Paw Sam is all in on the idea of a camping trip, and, true to form, he makes sure they plan for all the details needed for the trip. He also wants to be fully prepared, but the kids had failed to tell him the whole story, so he isn't fully equipped for what they would encounter later.

As the trip unfolds, Grand Paw Sam starts to realize that they're up for more than a simple camping adventure. The Swamp Witch is tracking them as they go, scaring Jane Alice, and prompting Cat to provide a slightly watered-down version of the whole story to Grand Paw Sam. Grand Paw Sam struggles to believe what he hears at first, but that eventually changes.



Grand Paw Sam was feigning irritation, but he was secretly amused by the talk of the ghost town and the Swamp Witch. He thought the kids' imaginations were running wild. He couldn't wait to hear what they had to say.

Still, Grand Paw Sam doesn't see the courage that Cat, Jane Alice, and Little Preacher demonstrate in the face of danger. Courage was one of the cornerstone principles of the Greatest Generation, and it was echoed later in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's book, *A World Split Apart*. He wrote: "Must one point out that from ancient times a decline in courage has been considered the first symptom of the end?"

In the Bible, the same was true as the Israelites debated entering the Promised Land.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:6-8

As you move through life, you will come to forks in the road where the courage to do the right thing will be called for. And you will have to make decisions. Will you face the problems, try to go around them, or even worse, turn and run?

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Seven:

1. We all need a _____ place.
2. It is almost impossible to wrap your mind around the _____.
3. Life is a great _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. What are your thoughts about small groups?

2. Have you ever considered the idea of **BEFORE TIME**? What does it mean to you?

3. When Napoleon fell from power and some of his followers migrated to Alabama to establish a French colony is a great example of two vastly different cultures colliding. It was in contrast to their lavish lifestyle in Paris, so it seemed stranger than fiction. (You can't make this up!) What are your thoughts on God's hand at work in things that seem to defy reason? Do you have other examples?

Points from Chapter Eight:

1. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the _____.
2. Your ability to recognize _____ in others is a sign of leadership.
3. A decline in courage has been considered the first symptom of the _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Do you believe God has a plan for you? Do you know what it might be? Can you share?

2. Do you recognize that God gifts people in different ways? Provide examples of skills that other people have that are helpful to you.

3. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's words about courage are quoted in this Guide. Courage was a hallmark trait of the Greatest Generation, which, in turn, was a driving force in making the United States a world power. Explain the correlation between that idea and Solzhenitsyn's comment about courage. Then, relate it back to the verse about the Promised Land:

LESSON #6



READING ASSIGNMENT:

CHAPTER NINE — SLEEPWALKING
and
CHAPTER TEN — GOOD GHOSTS



CHAPTER NINE SLEEPWALKING

As Cat, Little Preacher, and Jane Alice sit around the campfire on their first night in Aigleville, the ghost town, they start to get sleepy. Grand Paw Sam has already retired for the night.



Cat noticed that their conversation was starting to fade, and she could see that Jane Alice and Little Preacher's eyes were getting heavy, so she suggested it was time to get some sleep.

The beginning of Chapter Nine reminds us that Satan roams the Earth, seeking to destroy those who are not on guard.



True to her word, the Swamp Witch circled their camp, watching and waiting for a chance to pounce. She was leery of Grand Paw Sam, which is why she hadn't yet attacked the group.

In fact, the Bible reminds us more than 100 times that Satan roams the Earth! Consider this verse:

The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

Job 1:7

In the midst of the attack, when all hope seems lost, Little Preacher prays, "Lord, help me!"

We have all been there. Even if you haven't been in the same depths of despair as Little Preacher, chances are that you will hit some bumps in the road that will prompt you to pray for the same thing. The beauty of this part of the story is that Little Preacher's friends and family come running to his aid.



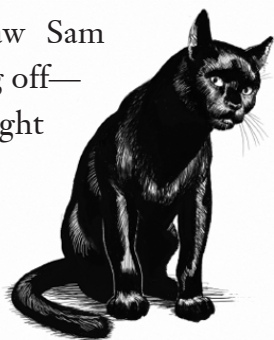
He was dreaming about making baseball bats, hitting home runs, and hearing the crowd roar all around him when he realized it was not cheering he was hearing, it was screams! He heard Little Preacher and Cat and Jane Alice all screaming for help. It took him all of about two seconds to find the handle of his baseball bat and get out of the tent, before he busted through the spider's web and headed for the woods, towards the sound of Little Preacher's voice...

... "Hold on, Little Preacher. Hold on, boy! I'm coming!" he yelled.

Hold on! That is what we need to think about when we call on the Lord. Sometimes we have to be strong and have patience, but we also have to have confidence and trust in the Lord.

Grand Paw Sam saves Little Preacher, but he's been shaken by the encounter with the Swamp Witch. Seeing is believing for the old man, and his instincts tell him they need to get out of there the next morning.

Cat is up first and finds Grand Paw Sam supposedly “standing guard”—while dozing off—outside the tent. It had been a difficult night for him, but Cat convinces him that they should cook breakfast for the group and that, instead of leaving, they should just move the camp to a safer spot. He agrees.



As they get settled into their new campsite for lunch, Grand Paw Sam shares his thoughts from a discussion he'd had with his wife before she passed away.



“Before she died, Carrie Mae told me that memories are a reminder from God. She said that, in addition to this physical world, there is a spiritual world that is only an arm’s length away, if we know which way to reach. We are making some wonderful memories here. I know we have had some scary moments, but it should only convince us that God is with us. There is good and evil in the physical world, and there is good and evil in the spiritual world. We’ve been witnessing both of those worlds coming together, and I choose to look at that as a blessing.”

As you nurture your spiritual life and become closer and closer to God, you will start to realize that He is very present and active around you. Make spiritual markers (recorded memories) of these events and use them to strengthen your faith. Pray continuously in your mind and in your prayer time for the Lord to place your steps and keep you and yours under His Wing. As you grow older and look back on these brushes with God, you will be buoyed when stormy waters arise, and you will have the strength to keep going forward in God's plan for you.

CHAPTER TEN

GOOD GHOSTS

The idea of a ghost town is not new. From the MSG version of the Bible, Isaiah paints a picture of the Promised Land (Isaiah 64:10) in a vision of the future from God. In Isaiah's prophecy, the land he saw was desolate and devoid of godliness. The Lord had taken away His peace because the people of Israel had turned away from him, succumbing to evil.

Your holy cities are all ghost towns: Zion's a ghost town, Jerusalem's a field of weeds.

Isaiah 64:10

God's message to the Israelites was simple. It was similar to what parents might say to their children in that it was instructions for how to live their lives. The truth is the truth. You can reject or embrace it—or land somewhere in between—but *you* decide what you put inside your mind, body, and spirit.

You also decide where your feet will be planted and whom you surround yourself with. Ultimately, you decide who you are and what you will become, but God is ever-present, wishing the best for you with love, just like a good parent.

At this point in the story, Aigleville has also succumbed to evil—by the Swamp Witch. It is devoid of life, but there are remnants of a once-thriving community. Cat hopes that a link to the good people that once occupied the town might still exist. “Good ghosts”!

In numerous examples in the Old Testament and history, God protected remnants of His chosen people from total destruction so they could eventually re-establish themselves in their homeland. The fact that most of His people continued to stray speaks volumes about the power of Satan, who is an adversary with immense skill and cunning.

If the outcome of this age-old tug of war between God and Satan sounds scary, you might want to consider the words of Cat’s momma when she saw her children getting out of line: “Straighten up!” she’d say. Don’t let evil turn you into a ghost of what you might have been.

Going back in time has great appeal to people and has been romanticized in literature countless times, but the Bible does not look at time travel the way we usually imagine it. In *Cat Luker*, one of the good witches explains:



“When we reach Aigleville, it will be 1819. We’ll be able to pass through walls and other barriers and understand the language of the townspeople. We’ll see the community as it was before the curse. We’ll take you to where the Swamp Witch lived, but we’ll take you to other places first so you can get a feel for the whole town.

You have to think in terms of God being the ultimate time traveler! He granted key people, Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example, visions of the future. The Bible also clearly states that God knew us before we were born (A BEFORE TIME reference). His relationship with time is not like ours.

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*

Jeremiah 1:5

If you think about it, we are all time travelers. We move forward through each day and plan for the next on a minute-by-minute basis while racing back to the past in search of memories or thoughts that keep us in tension between history and the future.

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Nine:

1. Satan roams the Earth, seeking to _____ those who are not on guard.
2. The Bible reminds us that Satan roams the Earth more than _____ times!
3. Make spiritual _____ to strengthen your faith.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. What form do you think Satan might take to have a negative impact on a person?

2. Have you ever prayed the “Lord Help Me!” prayer? Would you share that event?

3. Have you ever seen or felt God's presence in your life? What happened?

Points from Chapter Ten:

1. You can _____ or _____ God's message.
2. You decide where your _____ will be planted.
3. God said, "Before I _____ you in the _____, I knew you."

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Imagine the holy cities of Israel being reduced to desolate ghost towns. Why would God feel the need to take such a drastic step?

2. What comes to mind when you think about your feet being planted somewhere?

3. If you could go back in time and talk with Jesus, what would you say to Him?

LESSON #7



READING ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTER ELEVEN — THE TIME TRAVELERS and CHAPTER TWELVE — HALLOWEEN PARTY



CHAPTER ELEVEN THE TIME TRAVELERS

We have established that God is the ultimate time traveler, but in this chapter, Cat and her friends get a taste of going back in time to the early French settlement, Aigleville, in 1819.



Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes



Hovering a little above the ground, they started to glide forward, elevating just high enough to clear the underbrush and obstacles on the ground. They looked like a little train going through the woods, floating above the rough spots. Before they knew it, they were at the edge of town, but it didn't look the same as it did when they had been there before. It was neat and orderly, clear of kudzu and wisteria vines, seemingly healthy and growing. It was clear that people lived there. They could hear chatter in the distance, lantern light and candlelight glowed from the houses, and smoke drifted from the chimneys.

Cat soaked in the sights from over 100 years in the past and felt as if she were dreaming. She wanted to talk with Jane Alice and Little Preacher, but she knew she couldn't. At one point, they passed through a fence as if it weren't there; she flinched when she expected impact, but none came. *How did this turn into a ghost town?* she wondered. *How could that happen?*

How *could* that happen? We could ask ourselves that same question about any number of towns around the country! They might not be ghost towns, but the soul of these once-thriving American communities seems to have vanished. Just like Aigleville, we can point to a number of factors that led to their demise: economic problems, environmental issues, moral decay, and a loss of will. In Aigleville, evil was at the root of the problem. The Swamp Witch and her mother sought to undermine the agricultural goals of the fledgling settlement, an economic problem. They also tampered with the soil—an environmental issue that caused problems with their vine and

olive-growing dreams. In turn, that created strife and hardship, which led to poverty—more economics. That resulted in key leaders turning to their precious wine stock to numb their pain excessively—generating moral decay—and bickering and infighting about going home ensued—an issue of loss of will.

*And I answered the second time and said to him,
“What are the two olive branches which are beside
the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from
themselves?”*

Zechariah 4:12

This verse, and its surrounding verses, speaks of Jesus as the olive tree and of the olive branches as the Holy Spirit. The golden pipes contain olive oil, which is the grace that flows from Jesus to believers and keeps their lamps burning. When this flow is broken by evil works and sin, people suffer and communities fail.

Historically, one thing that has played a big role in forming and keeping our communities intact is our Christian churches, the fruit of Jesus’ spirit and teachings. Our country and our communities, large and small, will never be healthier than our local churches, according to Andy Stanley, the founder and senior pastor of North Point Ministries, one of the largest Christian organizations in the nation. In Cat’s experience, the center of her community, like other communities around the nation, is her church, Aimwell Baptist Church—mirroring the fact that churches were a huge factor in molding the youth of those times into the Greatest Generation.

According to Stanley, 70% of U.S. philanthropy in 2022 was provided by Christian churches. This is a staggering amount of

support for those in need and speaks to the influence of Jesus and His church—which is us!

Before Aigleville became a ghost town, trouble was brewing, and the support structure mentioned above was not firmly in place. Crops were failing, and strange things were happening. The young Swamp Witch was at odds with her own mother, and her mother was mad at the world because of her lot in life.

That is the scene when the time travelers arrive.



Even though they were there in the room in a dream-like state and they were invisible to the Swamp Witch, they did not feel safe. With her hair hanging down in her face and looking like a demon, the young Swamp Witch was crying mad after taking the beating of her life.

Then, out of nowhere, she looked up to the corner of the room, pointed at Cat, and whispered, “I’m going to get you!”

Cat was so spooked, she grabbed Jane Alice’s arm, pushing her towards Betty. “We have to leave!” she insisted. She had goosebumps all over her body, realizing that the Swamp Witch had the power to reach back in time and come after them.

And it gets worse from there.



All of a sudden, the walls of the house started to take on more solidity, and the group could see waves in the air coming from Maggot. She was so angry and mad that she was altering the state of the room and herself. She was no longer a figment of the past; she was very real and present in their space. Then, right before their eyes, she started to multiply.

When evil spills out in a community, it multiplies like a virus, infecting one person, then two, and then four, and so on, until it is rampant. The young Swamp Witch has 50 witches coming after Cat and the time travelers as they run for their lives. The Evil is coming, and Aigleville is a step closer to becoming a ghost town.

Jesus also faced demons during his earthly ministry, and he dealt with them in a forceful manner, even though the community he was helping did not appreciate His efforts and asked Him to leave.

He finds the man is possessed by a multitude of demons who give the collective name of “Legion”. Fearing that Jesus will drive them out of the world and into the abyss, they beg him instead to send them into a herd of pigs, which he does. The pigs then rush into the sea and are drowned.

Mark 5:13

The moral of this chapter is that, if we don't want our communities or ourselves to become a ghost of what we once were or a ghost town of potential unrealized, we need to keep evil and demons at bay.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HALLOWEEN PARTY

We must also keep in mind that evil does not stop coming after us! Just because we survive one brush with trouble does not mean we can let our guard down. In this case, the Swamp Witch thinks she has Cat and her friends right where she wants them in the ghost town, but her plans fall apart. Does she give up? No. She starts laying plans for another attack.



...The seasons were changing, and Halloween was coming. She thought to herself, *I will make them pay!* She turned to her domesticated vulture and grabbed him by the throat, shaking him violently.

“I will make them pay!” she screamed.

The vulture squawked and tried to escape, but she gripped him even tighter.

“Do you understand what we are going to do? Do you?” She answered for him, “We are going to haunt their precious Halloween costumes, and on Halloween night, they will be mine! I am a genius!”

The vulture wheezed, “You are brilliant!”

“Of course I am, you fool. I have a plan. I have a plan!”

Satan works exactly the same way. His plans and traps are complex. He does not always present simple choices between right and wrong; he tricks us into making bad decisions that might not appear to be “too bad” at the moment, but they are decisions that take us a step or two down the wrong path to the

point that it is hard to turn around.

An innocent Halloween Party sounds like fun, right? Costumes and candy, haunted houses, and scary stuff all rolled into one big event for the kids. What could go wrong?

Sometimes there are hints that things are not as they should be. As the Swamp Witch starts laying the groundwork for her treacherous plan, she casts spells on certain costumes.



Cat was the first to notice something strange with the costumes. As she prepared for bed, the green tights she had helped her momma make were placed neatly on a side chair. She got in bed and started to doze when she noticed the fairy tights were dancing in the moonlight in front of her window. She sat up in bed and looked again, finding them crumpled on the floor. Cat got up, thinking, *I must be dreaming*, and placed the tights back on the chair, second-guessing herself about having placed them there in the first place.

*Those who seek my life lay snares for me;
And those who seek to injure me have threatened
destruction,
And they devise treachery all day long.*

Psalm 38:12

Beware of evil lurking around you. Don't dismiss the hints. Give your instincts some credit, and have a conversation with yourself or with friends and family. If something does not seem right, there could be a reason for it. It is better to nip evil in the

bud than to allow it time to grow.

In this chapter, Little Preacher also shares a story about the Holy Ghost; it's a gift from Jesus that you can turn to in times of trouble. Don't forget about that option! It dwells in your heart and is available 24/7. Also known as the Holy Spirit, it is part of the Trinity— God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All of whom are connected and available to you.

But the Swamp Witch has big plans in her effort to impress the Great Snake and The Evil. Haunted costumes were just a warm-up. A haunted house full of evil creatures and a circus loaded with dubious characters would soon descend on Aimwell, all under the guise of coincidence and good fun.

We must remember that evil works hard day and night to win us over to the dark side. There are legions of evil-doers in the world we live in, and some present themselves as normal people, friendly on the outside but with bad intentions below the surface. You don't need to live in fear because God is with you, but you do need to keep your guard up.

This is not unlike what we face each day on our electronic devices. There are all sorts of scams perpetrated by criminals on the dark web to circumvent the security measures that protect your contact list, your finances, your content, and your safety. Satan works the same way in the physical world—in all of our worlds, for that matter—and we need to deploy the same level of security measures and mindset to protect ourselves from the agents of evil.



REVIEW

Points from Chapter Eleven:

1. The soul of several once-thriving American communities seems to have _____.
2. You can point to a number of _____ that led to their demise: economic problems, environmental issues, moral decay, and a loss of will.
3. _____, one key thing that has helped form and keep our communities intact is our Christian churches.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. The French settlers in the story came to the Alabama territory over 200 years ago. What was the population in the United States at that time, and how many Christian churches dotted the country?

2. Zechariah 4:12 refers to “golden pipes.” Explain what they represent as it relates to Jesus.

3. 50 witches spreading evil in our world like a virus is not just an idea, it's real. Can you give examples, with illegal drugs as the category, where this is happening in our country?

Points from Chapter Twelve:

1. We must also keep in mind that _____ does not stop coming after you!
2. Satan's plans and traps are _____.
3. You must remember this: evil works hard _____ and _____!

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. There is an old saying about "trouble coming to town," which is reflected in the events of the Swamp Witch and the circus in this chapter. How did the good people of Aimwell get deceived in this situation? Has trouble ever deceived you? Explain.

2. Think about the idea of a slippery slope or bad decisions that don't seem "too bad." Do you understand the concept of risk? If you take too many steps down a slippery slope, there is a risk you will slide into the river and be swept away. Have you ever gone down the slippery slope? Can you share?

[illegible]

3. What do you think it means when we discuss the Trinity as God in three persons?

[illegible]

NOTES:

LESSON #8



READING ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTER THIRTEEN — A MUFFIN IN THE CIRCUS and CHAPTER FOURTEEN — TUBBY & MUFFINS



CHAPTER THIRTEEN A MUFFIN IN THE CIRCUS

As the Swamp Witch's scheme starts to take shape, even Cat gets caught up in the excitement. But even in the midst of treachery, a blessing of huge proportions emerges for Cat—a sweet monkey named Muffins, who will be her friend forever.

We have mentioned that evil works hard, day and night, to win you over to the dark side— but never doubt for a minute that God is not doing the same thing to keep you safe. In this case, he brought Cat to Muffins (or Muffins to Cat!).





When Cat arrived, it took her hand.

“What’s your name?” Cat asked as she squeezed the monkey’s hand.

“My name’s Muffins,” the monkey whispered quietly in wide-eyed wonder. “How can you talk to me?” she asked.

“It is just a gift I have,” Cat whispered back.

“My name’s Cat.”

“Nice to meet you, Cat,” Muffins replied.

“Can you get me out of here? There are bad people in this circus.”

Please remember this, as well:

God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

This is not a small matter! Believe me—you will face adversity in life. Satan will attempt to weave a web around you, and you need to be prepared. And part of being prepared is knowing God will be there for you. If you can’t see that at first, keep looking. Pray for that helping hand. God loves you dearly and does not want to see you suffer. And don’t let guilt keep you from asking for help. Your sins are already forgiven. Play the song “Run to the Father” by Cody Carnes if you like!

***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and
learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is
easy and my burden is light.”***

Matthew 11:28-30

This mindset defines Cat; it is how she moves through life with confidence and peace. You can as well, but it requires commitment and focus.

In our story, Cat’s focus turns to rescuing Muffins from the bad people in the circus!

Christians have a long history of rescuing people, animals—and whole nations, for that matter—from evil forces. One of the hallmarks of the Greatest Generation is how they rose to the occasion to confront Hitler’s forces in Europe during World War II as well as their axis-of-evil partner, the Empire of Japan, after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. was founded on Christian principles by our forefathers, and the Greatest Generation embodied those principles, took them to heart, and fought for our freedom and the freedom of others.

America was not spoiling for a fight in WWII; we did not go looking for an excuse to enter the conflict. The conflict came to us, and our ancestors responded to the challenge.

When the circus comes to town, Cat eventually realizes it is bringing conflict to Aimwell. And they did not have good intentions. It was a sneak attack, using Trojan Horse techniques to get inside the community and wreak havoc.

In the *Odyssey* by Homer, the powerful city of Troy is destroyed by its own foolishness when its people invite a “remarkable gift” from the Greeks inside their own walls. For

a decade, Troy's fortress was too strong for Greece's assault, and a more creative technique was required. After pretending to give up, Greece presented a huge, amazing wooden horse sculpture to the Trojans as a gesture of peace. Troy, naively, opened its gates to bring in the massive, enticing "gift." The punch-line, however, consisted of the Greek soldiers concealed inside.

Troy fell due to a lapse in good judgment and by letting their defenses down. The Trojans themselves invited defeat to enter their gate. The story by Homer had existed for hundreds of years when King Hezekiah ruled Jerusalem, but apparently, he didn't read it; he essentially made the same mistake!

Having survived ongoing attacks by the Assyrian army, Hezekiah was afflicted with a life-threatening illness. Hezekiah, who was a good man, cried out to God, who in turn spared his life and promised him another 15 years. The news of his recovery spread far and wide, and the king of the mighty Babylonian empire sent his representatives with good wishes and a gift. But they did not have good intentions.

Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses—the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine olive oil—his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

Isaiah 39:2

Eventually, after Hezekiah passed, the Babylonian army returned and took everything. The Swamp Witch, on the other hand, had read about Troy and understood the value of fighting

from the inside. Cat is right; the circus was her Trojan Horse.



The Ringmaster stepped into his private tent and vanished. In the blink of an eye, he appeared in the Swamp Witch's cottage in the middle of the swamp. The Swamp Witch was expecting him and was seated at her table, waiting.

"Quite the grand entrance you made in Aimwell! Everyone was very impressed!" She complimented him.

Don't allow Satan to get a foothold in your heart and mind. Be aware that he is at work inside your community and country, for that matter. He knows better than anyone how to implement a Trojan Horse strategy. Be on guard!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TUBBY & MUFFINS

What seems obvious to Cat about how to rescue Muffins is not obvious to Jane Alice and Little Preacher. They struggle with the idea of essentially "stealing" a monkey from the circus, and Cat has to work hard to convince them it is the right thing to do. Even after they successfully accomplish the rescue, they have doubts and guilt—not to mention fear—that they made a mistake and will be caught.

Be aware that it might not always be clear what God would

have you do. Life is filled with an ongoing series of decisions. You will make good decisions and bad ones; the reality is that, given the way God's plan unfolds for you, what might appear to be a bad decision or an unfortunate event could be the best thing that ever happens to you. This is where faith is critical. You have to know that He wants the best for you, no matter what. Do your best and pray without ceasing for God to place your steps—and try to do what you think and believe to be the right thing. There is nothing more rewarding than to be able to look back on your life and see where God's Hand was at work.

As the circus settles in and creates a distraction for the community, the Swamp Witch continues to work on her master plan for Halloween.



The Swamp Witch hunched over a big batch of candy melting in the fire pot as she prepared for Halloween. She had spent the last few days conjuring up several varieties of special treats. The children would get transformed to her favorite creatures based on the first piece of candy they selected.

She had loaded the Haunted House with every vile creature the swamp had to offer, including the dead. The antebellum mansion had become a gathering place for everything evil.

Candy is sweet, and you can argue that it is a temptation. And, in some instances, that temptation is like bait on a hook. The Swamp Witch takes a very innocent thing, Halloween candy, and turns it into a trap with dire consequences.

The Swamp Witch knows that Aimwell's greatest vulnerability is its kids. She also knows that if she takes them away from their parents permanently, the community will collapse, the church will fall, and she will be victorious.

In the King James Version of the Bible, a well-known verse reads:

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6:13

We need to think about this verse even though we've heard it so many times that it's almost like a platitude that washes over us without sinking in. Saint Matthew was one of the 12 disciples and a tax collector before he was called by Jesus to follow Him. When it comes to temptation, Matthew understood that trap better than most because of his position. As a tax collector, he was in a position to over-tax people, put the extra money in his pocket, and steal from the people of his community. It was a common practice, and tax collectors were despised for it.

Matthew understood how such a temptation could lead to evil. His actions as a tax collector could lead to misery and death for those who crossed him. He was in a position to inflict pain on those he did not like, and that was evil.

We look to God to protect us from the evil of others but also to protect us from ourselves. We all have the capacity to do evil things. We can hurt others with our words and actions, and we can hurt ourselves by not taking care of how we treat our bodies, God's temple.

The last part of Matthew's verse reminds us that God has sovereign control over each of us and that we can lean on Him for guidance and protection. It is part of the perfect prayer that Jesus gave us all to use on a daily basis.

In Cat's case, Muffins provides insight into the relationship between the Swamp Witch and the Ringmaster, and it allows her to take action and prepare for an attack. It is scary information, but it is also answered prayer, God's hand at work.

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Thirteen:

1. Evil works hard _____ and _____ to win you over to the _____ side.
2. God is able to bless you _____.
3. Don't allow Satan to have a foothold in your _____ and _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. The scheme that the Swamp Witch puts together to attack Aimwell, using the circus and Halloween as tools for her plan, is complex. Do you think Satan is capable of putting a complex scheme in place to trick you? Please explain.

2. Does the idea of “running to the Father” make you feel weak or strong, dumb or smart, or all of the above?

3. What does the story of *The Odyssey* tell you about letting your guard down? Have you ever been tricked by something that appeared to be a gift? Have you ever heard the expression: “If it looks (or sounds) too good to be true, it probably isn’t?”

Points from Chapter Fourteen:

1. Be aware that it might not always be clear what _____ would have you do.
2. Candy is _____. You can also argue that it is a _____. And, in some instances, that temptation is like bait on a _____.
3. God has _____ control over each of us.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. In the big picture of right and wrong, how did you feel about Cat convincing her friends to help her “rescue” Muffins from the circus?

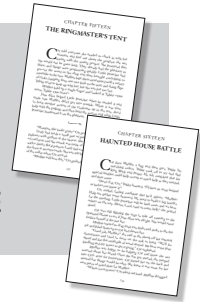
2. In this chapter, candy is used as a metaphor for things that might be appealing to people, which, in many cases, are not really good for you. Can you name a few examples? They do not have to be food related.

3. In Matthew 6:13, temptation and evil go hand in hand. Money can represent a temptation for some people. Can you list three ways that money—as a temptation—can lead to evil? Can you also list three ways in which money can be used for good? What is the stark difference between these two options?

LESSON #9



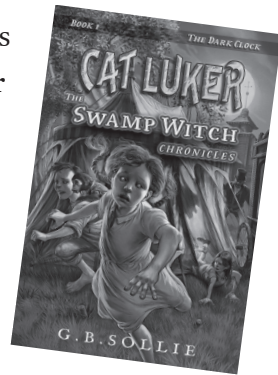
READING ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTER FIFTEEN — THE RINGMASTER'S TENT and CHAPTER SIXTEEN — HAUNTED HOUSE BATTLE



CHAPTER FIFTEEN THE RINGMASTER'S TENT

If you look at the cover of this book, you'll see a scene from this chapter. Cat is in the foreground, Jane Alice is being grabbed by the Swamp Witch—silhouetted from the lantern in the tent—and Little Preacher has Muffins on his back as they try to escape. In the background, the Ringmaster is coming around his tent, and Aimwell Baptist Church's steeple stands in the distance.

I created the original sketch of this artwork and used my grandkids as models for the main characters—Cat, Little Preacher, and Jane Alice—along with some composite images of the real people the characters represent—my parents—when they were young. I hired a great illustrator, who is skilled with this type of artwork, to do the final cover art, but I was able to convey to him my vision. He also read the story and got a feel for the



details for himself. This scene plays out starting on page ten of the chapter.

I tell you this to let you know that each detail I describe, and even the words I am writing at this very moment, came to me from God. Every creative thought, every step of progress, every hurdle that had to be overcome was God's hand at work. I made a commitment to God to do what he would have me do, and I stuck with it! It has been one of the most rewarding things in my life.

So, if you ever feel compelled to take something on—whether it's a project, a big decision, or anything else—please take it to the Lord and try to stay in lockstep with Him as you move forward. I use the word “lockstep” because, just as in life in general, you can start on a project with good intentions and God's blessing and still wander off the path He has for you. Remember, Satan is always lurking with the intent to keep you from accomplishing God's mission.

But, back to the story! Cat intended to stay in lockstep with the Lord on her mission with her friends, but it was not always easy to do, as the evil forces she was dealing with continued to place stumbling blocks along their path.

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

Matthew 16:23

Jesus told Peter and Satan to get out of His way at the same time, but Peter struggled with the idea of Jesus allowing Himself to be put to death by the Jewish religious leaders. And Cat and her friends felt the same way. Even Grand Paw Sam

allowed himself to be distracted from the work at hand by a friend.

This slip by Peter did not change God's plan for him. He obviously went on to do marvelous things.

“And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew 16:18

This is an interesting contrast, and it's something to think about as you set your sights on serving the Lord. In a span of a few verses, Peter went from being “the rock” to being Satan's stumbling block, and God/Jesus chastised him for it. So, rest assured, if God/Jesus is willing to correct Peter, he will certainly correct *you*! It might not happen in an obvious manner, and it might take several thumps to get your attention. Just like a parent trying to teach a child not to do something dangerous or off-limits, God will let you know. If you are smart, you will listen.

And the beautiful thing is, the more you listen, the more confidence you have in what you are doing. That is Cat's experience, and she lives it out.

We have all heard the expression, “Be all you can be!” But I would like to add to that challenge with the following: “Be all you can be—mentally, physically, and spiritually.” The best way to accomplish this is with God in your life on a daily basis. If you need to make some changes, think of it as an “inflection point” or a place in time when you are going to start trying to avoid getting “thumps” from Jesus for not being all in! And remember, those thumps are love taps from a Father that wants

the best for you.

But a word of caution! If you follow this path with 100% focus, you will find it is not easy at first. It will be the highest mountain you ever climb, but when you reach the summit—God’s High Place—you will find peace and happiness like never before.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

HAUNTED HOUSE BATTLE

When the battle of your life looms in front of you, it can sometimes be hard to steady your nerves. It is a good time to have lots of friends around you for support. But an interesting thing happens when there is a big battle to fight; all of your friends don’t always show up! Now, that does not mean they are not your friends; they could have other commitments or battles of their own. Or they might be reluctant to get involved for other reasons; they might be afraid, for example. But make note of the ones that do show up and stick with you—or at least try. They could be a blessing that lasts a lifetime.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane preparing for His betrayal and, ultimately, His crucifixion, He was surrounded by his closest disciples. These men had seen Him perform countless miracles and amazing acts of spiritual goodness over many years. But when confronted by the combined fury of the Romans and Jews, they abandoned Jesus and even pretended not to know Him. Peter denied knowing Him three times. But Jesus knew they were only human and forgave them, and in the end, the men carried out the mission of spreading the Gospel and starting the Church, the Body of Christ.

And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Mark 14:72

Not as many friends show up to help Cat confront the Swamp Witch and help save Jane Alice as she hopes, and even Grand Paw Sam is nowhere to be found. But she is thankful for the help that does appear, and she moves forward with the mission. She will go forward by herself if need be. She is not going to let Jane Alice down.



“We made it!” Little Preacher announced. “But we didn’t get as many as we hoped. I thought about trying to pull some of the good folks from the circus, but I was afraid it might tip off the Swamp Witch that we were coming.”

There were six kids with Little Preacher, and three of them were Cat’s brothers: Otto, Cecil, and Raymond. “Okay. Did you tell them to spread the word about the candy?” Cat questioned.

“We did, but I’m not quite sure they believed us,” Little Preacher confessed. “But we tried!”

Cat’s brothers nodded in agreement.

“Cat, we drew straws to see who would come,” Cecil shared. “All of us would have come, but we felt that some of us needed to stay with Momma, just in case.”

“And I couldn’t bring myself to ask Evelyn and Alfred, Cat. I was afraid Momma and Daddy might find out. No sign of Grand Paw Sam—he has disappeared!” said Little Preacher.

As the saying goes, “It just takes one,” and, in this instance, God called on Little Preacher to pull off a miracle of his own:



Cat looked calmly at Little Preacher like he was playing off third base and getting ready to steal home. She patted his back pocket where the slingshot was resting and nodded that she understood.

“You know what to do,” she mouthed to him as if they were in a protective bubble that drowned out all the noise.

That was all it took. Little Preacher winked back at her and took off for home. The Swamp Witch balked in shock but laughed mockingly, her head was thrown back and her mouth was gaping open in a slobbering drunken stance. Little Preacher had made this move a thousand times out in the woods, fighting imaginary soldiers. He dove into a somersault and slid over to a circular table, as the goons tried to grab at him with all their strength. He skillfully pulled his slingshot out of his back pocket, grabbed a yellow piece of rat candy from the bowl, and in one smooth motion fired a shot up to the balcony into the Swamp Witch’s nasty open mouth and down her throat. She instantly started a painful-looking transformation into a rat. Her body contorted in a wrenching twist that caused her arms and legs to flail all around as she fell, face-first, to the floor. It was hideous to behold, and the spells she had cast over so many in the room were suddenly broken.

Victory is mine, says the Lord! Or, in scriptural words:

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Fifteen:

1. Satan is always _____ with the intent to keep you from accomplishing God's mission.
2. It is Cat's intention to stay in _____ with the Lord on their mission.
3. Rest assured, if God/Jesus is willing to correct Peter, he will certainly correct _____!

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Fun fact questions: Who were the models for Cat, Little Preacher, and Jane Alice? What does the Bible say about grandchildren?

2. Do you feel like you have a mission in life? Explain. Are you in lockstep with God?

3. How closely do you follow Jesus? Can you reach out and touch him? Is he barely in sight or somewhere in between? Does it vary from week to week? Why?

Points from Chapter Sixteen:

1. When the battle of your life looms in front of you, it can sometimes be hard to _____ your nerves.
2. Peter denied knowing Jesus _____ times.
3. Remember, it just takes _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. As we discussed, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, but at the same time, he was trying to stay close to Him. Can he be given any grace for his actions?

2. If you had a friend in distress, how far would you go to save them? Would you risk your life?

[illegible]

3. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “I have overcome the world.” What does he mean?

LESSON #10



READING ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTER SEVENTEEN — RELIANT AND DEFIANT and CHAPTER EIGHTEEN — THE DARK CLOCK



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN RELIANT AND DEFIANT

“To fight the good fight” is an expression in this chapter that comes from the Book of First Timothy. Cat recalls her father using the expression.



There was evil on the outskirts and in the swamp, trying to break their spirit, but, as her daddy always said, if they relied on God and fought the good fight, they would live in peace.

The actual verse reads as follows.

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:12

Cat is reflecting on the “peace” that descended on them after they were brave enough to confront the Swamp Witch and her evil plans. In Cat’s mind, they had followed God’s instructions (“fought the good fight”) and had been rewarded. But at the same time, she feels that the work hasn’t been completed, and the peace could work against them if they are not careful.

When she needs to think, Cat likes to immerse herself in art. Her creativity is usually driven by broad concepts that play in her mind. She knows that the peace they’re enjoying is an extension of the “vine” Little Preacher had described, connecting her to Jesus the Son and God the Father. She visualizes Aimwell Baptist Church from a birds-eye view, which she actually had the joy of seeing as an eagle! But in this season, the church is surrounded by fall colors. She places the church in the center of the painting she is working on; in her mind, it is the heart of the community, as Jesus is the heart of the church. And, like vines reaching out into the community, the good people of Aimwell are connected to the source, delivering good deeds to those in need. They connect everyone together through Jesus and His church.

Cat resolves to be reliant on God and defiant of Satan. She and her friends have been through too much to sit back and pretend the struggle is over. And as a reminder, she paints the words at the top of her picture and can’t wait to share her work with Little Preacher and Jane Alice.

Cat also used her Faith Star as a reminder to keep the faith.



If they truly wanted to enjoy their peace and freedom, they had to fight for it every day. Instead of hoping the Swamp Witch never bothered them again, they needed to make sure it didn't happen. Grand Paw Sam had given them the Faith Star Symbol as a keepsake of their vision on The Hill, but also as a symbol of their bond as Christians, fighting for their beliefs. She clutched the simple star and remembered how she felt that night as she stared at the heavenly stars.

"If I REMEMBER," she whispered.

From the very beginning, as Christians, we have always been in a fight. A battle rages around us now just as it did around Jesus in his time on Earth. The difference is we live in this current world, where the battle is not as visible or obvious. We are not being directly persecuted or attacked for our beliefs in a physical manner. Satan has taken a more subtle approach, which, in some cases, is even more effective. And just like Cat, we need to keep our guards up. We need to remember what we know!

Cat is proactive with Little Preacher and Jane Alice as she meets with them in the secret room of the church. She knows if they become complacent in this peaceful period, they will fall victim to the Swamp Witch again. It is just a matter of time.

We, too, need to urge each other on and avoid that same complacency! As Christians, we need to take action, and that

action should be centered around love for one another. That might sound counter-intuitive when we think in terms of a war, but our best weapon against Satan and his evil works is good works. There are people all around us who need help—people who are vulnerable to Satan’s power because they’ve been beaten down by life. The basic things we take for granted—food, shelter, safety, medical care, education, and *hope!*—are things that have been taken away. So, step one is to take care of these fundamental needs for those in need.

How do we do that? We each have unique gifts, and we are called to step forward and use those gifts for God’s purpose. Enjoying the peace of God’s paradise is not a vacation; it is a vocation. Faith without works is dead—true faith in Christ results in good deeds, good works! Use your God-given talents to help others less fortunate than you and watch peace flourish.

Grand Paw Sam sees the kids working hard to focus their efforts on the church, and he wants to honor that by making them a larger Faith Star Symbol to hang in their meeting area. He sees Little Preacher studying the Bible with an intense focus that is beyond his years.



“Daddy, I was reading Ephesians, and I came across this verse that made me start thinking.”

He recited the verse to perfection, impressing his daddy and drawing his praise. “What prompted you to read Ephesians, son? That is a complex book in the Bible.”

“I’ve been doing some Bible study with Cat and Jane Alice and been trying to encourage them to depend on God. It’s hard to explain to them how powerful He can be for you if you trust in Him. They struggle with the idea that terrible things happen to good people. I thought if I could convince them that they are children of God, chosen by Him, that it would hit home. This verse even goes a step further. It tells us we were chosen before the world was even created!”

Here’s the expanded scripture:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1: 1-6

Never doubt your place in the world!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE DARK CLOCK

Preacher Sollie shares his vision of the Dark Clock with his son, Little Preacher, opening Little Preacher's eyes to the fact that Cat has the same vision. There's no doubt in the boy's mind that the Swamp Witch is a dark angel cast down to Earth. He is overwhelmed by what his father tells him and knows he needs to talk with Cat. They are in more danger than they think—if that is possible.

As you ponder the concept of the Dark Clock, there's one more thing to consider: Little Preacher, Cat, and Jane Alice are in the process of taking responsibility for the protection and perpetuation of our faith. A “changing of the guard,” if you will, is in effect, from Preacher Sollie to the three young people. From one generation to the next. This is an awesome responsibility, and it is at the heart of why Christianity has endured for over 2,000 years. In Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, we are introduced to the phrase “Godly offspring”—that is, God's desire to carry the faith forward. Please don't ever take that concept lightly. It is not something that can be accomplished without tremendous effort and focus. Many have died in the process over the centuries. It is worth protecting!

In fact, it is a “burn the boat” decision—one that you can't, in good faith, go back on. Cat embraces their decision and knows they need answers to certain questions so they can plan for the future. So, she enlists King Black to get the answers.



King Black watched in disbelief and muttered quietly, “Check, check, and check,” as he turned to leave.

He had been asked to find the Great Snake, so they could pinpoint his location. Tubby and Pokey were trying to determine if the Swamp Witch was back in action. And at some point, they wanted to find out if the Great Snake and The Evil were one and the same or if it was a different being. King Black realized that he had the answers to all three with one visit. There was also the added bonus of the Salem-to-Selma history and what the Swamp Witch was doing with this insane army idea.

It is a common practice to avoid facing the truth. Sometimes we prefer to live happily in ignorance instead of facing reality. Reality often requires hard work; even if your grass is too tall and needs to be cut, you might look the other way and kid yourself that all is well. And you know that snakes love tall grass, by the way.



But Cat prefers to know what she is facing, reality-wise, so she can be prepared. And King Black delivers. It is even worse than she imagines, but at least she knows it. And a funny thing happens when she begins to clearly see what’s going on: it energizes her to meet the problem head-on. Not with fear and doubt, but with confidence and enthusiasm.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

Even as she learns from King Black the harsh details about the Swamp Witch, the Great Snake, and The Evil—not to mention the rat army, the scary news about Salem and Selma, and Little Preacher’s update about the Dark Clock—Cat is shocked but not shaken.



“Little Preacher,” Cat sighed, “it is up to us to stop them...”

“Yes, it’s scary to think about how long this has been going on and that they tried to get him as well, but it gives me hope to think he has battled them with prayer all these years, by himself! There are three of us! Plus, Grand Paw Sam!” she laughed. “Lord willing, they can’t beat us!”

“Amen!” said Little Preacher. “There’s your prayer, Jane Alice!”



In the cottage, the Swamp Witch glared into a mirror, rats and spiders squirming at her feet. The Great Snake had cut short her plan for the moment, but he couldn’t stop her rage. The witch’s face contorted in disgust at the thought of Aimwell’s continued existence. She looked down at the vermin on the floor and spoke softly to them. “Bide your time, my babies. Bide your time. Vengeance awaits.”

THE END

REVIEW

Points from Chapter Seventeen:

1. Fight the good _____.
2. Cat resolved to be _____ on God and _____ of Satan.
3. He chose us in Him before the _____ of the world.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. What does 1 Timothy 6:12 mean to you?

2. When she needed to think, Cat liked to immerse herself in art. What do you feel inclined to do when you need to think?

3. Do you have any doubts about your place in the world? What do you think God's plan is for you?

Points from Chapter Eighteen:

1. Our _____ has endured for over 2,000 years.
2. Reality often requires _____.
3. It is up to _____.

Questions: (Some of these answers can be found in your Bible.)

1. Consider two ideas: Preacher Sollie guarded the vision of the Dark Clock that God shared with him, and the responsibility for guarding our faith has to be passed on from generation to generation. Do those two ideas make you believe our faith needs to be protected? What does the idea of guarding our faith mean to you?

2. There are many examples in history of explorers and leaders “burning their boats” when they have made a decision to press forward with their mission—as Cat did. They decided not to go back! Becoming a Christian is like that; you leave your old ways behind you and bravely move forward as a new creature. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and explain what it means to you.

3. Facing the truth is sometimes difficult because it requires you to take action, which can be hard work! But, in the end, you are better off for having made the effort. What steps can you take in your life to prepare you to readily face the truth on decisions, large and small?

CONCLUSION

Here's what doesn't matter: how old you are, where you came from, and what you do. They don't matter. What matters is the truth. The truth about God and His Son Jesus. If you want to live a life based on the teachings of Jesus and find true happiness, peace, and understanding, know that it starts by seeking God and Jesus, who are one and the same, existing as one with the Holy Spirit.

One thing God did for you, in that regard, is He placed a Bible at your fingertips. I am convinced that the Bible provides a blueprint, from Genesis to Revelation, for building “God’s Foundation for Life.” The teachings, stories, and parables contained in the Bible provide an outline that builds a strong foundation, layer by layer. It’s a foundational platform for life that will not crumble beneath you when times get hard.

You get to decide how long it will take to build that foundation. It might take a lifetime for some and a blink of an eye for others. The first layer of the foundation is belief, which is an extremely simple yet deceptively difficult concept. It’s easy to say, “I believe,” but it’s not easy to do. And that is why it takes some people so long to grasp the beauty of it.

This blueprint, this outline, this beauty is God’s masterwork—it is us. It is *creation*. He starts the Bible with lesson number one: “In the beginning ...” And he takes us gently through the struggles of life, from A to Z. He shows us, like a Master Craftsman demonstrating to an apprentice how to build that foundation—from wandering in the wilderness to resurrection, from being betrayed to embraced, from war to

peace, and from hate to love.

Don't let life go by without God in your life. Don't make the mistake of thinking you have time to fix things later. Embrace life, learn the lessons as soon as you can, and live a good life. That is what God wants for you, and that is why he sent Jesus: to show us The Way.

Obviously, the journey is not over! Cat, Little Preacher, Jane Alice, and Grand Paw Sam have more challenges ahead of them!

I hope you have enjoyed this Bible Study Guide, as well as *Cat Luker: The Swamp Witch Chronicles*. I pray God's Best for you and hope you will join us on the next adventure!