THE MYSTERY BANDIT

A Bible Adventure About the Thief Who Steals What's Most Valuable



CHRONICLES OF A REFORMER

The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

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A Bible Adventure About the Thief
Who Steals What's Most Valuable

For every mom and dad who has ever been there but not really there, and for every kid who has ever said, “Watch this!”

The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

Chronicles of a Reformer

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FROM THE BOY WHO PUSHES THE PLOW

Dear moms, dads, grandparents and teachers,

This story belongs to a season I call Recalculate. It is one of the nine seasons of the Kingdom of God that I write about in the Chronicles of a Reformer books. Recalculate is the season when God shows us we have drifted off course and lovingly turns us around before the wrong road costs us any more.

Von and Ashley set out to stop a thief who was hurting other families. They came home knowing he had been in their own house the whole time. That is what Recalculate feels like. The thing we were sure could never touch us had already crept in, one small worry at a time.

Most of us have been there. The good news is that God does not shame us for it. He shows us, He turns us around, and He gives back what the enemy stole.

The best sermon your children will ever hear about time is the one they watch you live.

So read this book slowly. Stop and ask the questions. Let your kids catch you putting the phone down. Eat the chicken, throw away the bone, and keep your lamp burning.

The Boy Who Pushes the Plow



THE LEGEND

Long ago, in a little village tucked between green hills, people whispered about a thief. They called him the Mystery Bandit.

Grandmas warned about him. Shopkeepers locked their doors. Kids told stories about him around the campfire. He had been stealing from families for years and years, longer than anyone could remember.

But here was the strange part. Nobody could say exactly what he stole.

BATTLE CRY • The most dangerous thief is the one nobody can name.



NOT OUR FAMILY

In that village lived Von and Ashley and their three children: Jasper, Hazel and little Micah. Their house was always full: full of laughter, full of muddy boots, full of neighbors who needed a helping hand.

“That bandit would never dare come near our family,” Von said, tucking Micah’s blanket under his chin.

Ashley nodded. “But if he’s hurting other families, somebody needs to stop him.”

They looked at each other, and they both knew who that somebody would be.

BATTLE CRY • The family that thinks it’s safe is the one he loves to visit.



READY FOR BATTLE

The next morning, Von and Ashley asked their closest friends to watch over Jasper, Hazel and Micah. Hugs were given. Tears were wiped. Promises were made.

Then they packed for the road: bread, water, warm blankets, a lantern, and most important of all, the Word of God.

As they buckled their packs, Ashley opened her Bible and read the verse out loud. Von grinned. “Let’s go catch a thief.”

“Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.”

Ephesians 6:11 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • Never walk into a battle without the Word of God.



THROUGH THE STORM

The road was long and hard. They climbed rocky mountains and crossed rushing rivers. Thunder cracked. Rain poured. The wind howled so loud they had to shout to hear each other.

Some nights they were cold. Some nights they were tired. But every night, before they fell asleep, they prayed for their children back home.

Thinking of those three little faces made their hearts strong. Weeks turned into months, and still they kept going.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.”

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • Love for your family will carry you through any storm.



WHISPERS ON THE ROAD

Everywhere they went, people had something to say.

“I heard he lives on top of the tallest mountain!” said a farmer.

“No, no, he hides deep in the forest,” said a merchant.

“Hurry,” warned an old woman. “He’s stealing from somebody right now.”

Every story made Von and Ashley walk a little faster. They had to find him, and they had to find him soon.

BATTLE CRY • Not every voice on the road is telling you the truth.



THE CAVE BY THE BROOK

At last they came to a little brook that bubbled and sparkled over smooth stones. Beside it was the dark mouth of a cave.

Outside the cave, a fishing pole leaned against a pile of firewood.

Von knelt down and touched the ashes of an old campfire. “Still warm,” he whispered. “Somebody lives here.”

Ashley took a deep breath and lifted her lantern. “Then it’s time.”

BATTLE CRY • Courage takes the next step even when the cave is dark.



INTO THE DARK

Step by step, they walked into the cave. Drip. Drip. Drip. Water fell from the ceiling, and their footsteps echoed off the walls.

Ashley whispered a verse she had learned as a little girl.

Then the lantern light fell on something in the far corner. It was an old man, thin and frail, sitting quietly with his hands folded in his lap.

“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.”

Psalm 119:105 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • God’s Word lights up the darkest places.



ARE YOU THE BANDIT?

Von stepped forward, his voice steady. “Are you the Mystery Bandit?”

The old man lifted his head. He looked at them for a long, long moment. Then he nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “I am.”

Von and Ashley stared. After all those months, all those storms, all those stories, the most feared thief in the land was a tiny old man in a cave?

BATTLE CRY • The enemy is never as big as the stories about him.



TELL US THE TRUTH

Ashley wasn’t afraid. “We know you’ve been stealing from families for years,” she said. “Tell us what you take. Tell us how you hurt families. And tell us why nobody ever talks about it!”

The old man smiled a slow, knowing smile.

“I’ll gladly tell you,” he said. “But what I steal is not what you think.”

Von and Ashley leaned in close.

BATTLE CRY • Bring hidden things into the light and they lose their power.



THE TIME BANDIT

“Mystery Bandit is only my nickname,” the old man said. “My real name is the Time Bandit. I don’t steal gold. I don’t steal jewels. I steal time.”

“I whisper worries into people’s ears. What if something bad happens? What if you’re missing out? They get so busy worrying about tomorrow that they forget to enjoy today.”

“Moms and dads stop really seeing their kids. Kids stop really seeing their parents. And the moments slip away, one by one, into my sack.”

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

John 10:10 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • Worry borrows from tomorrow and steals from today.



THE SECRET OF SILENCE

“But why does nobody ever tell?” Von asked.

The Time Bandit chuckled. “Shame,” he said. “And regret.”

“When people finally see how much time I’ve stolen, they feel embarrassed. They don’t want to admit they chased worries instead of loving each other. So they keep quiet. And while they stay quiet, I keep stealing.”

BATTLE CRY • Shame wants you quiet. Grace wants you free.



HE WAS ALREADY HOME

Von and Ashley looked at each other, and their hearts sank.

They remembered dinners when they were at the table but their minds were far away. Bedtime stories cut short because they were busy. The times Jasper shouted, “Watch this!” and they hadn’t really watched.

The Time Bandit never needed to break down their door. He had snuck in quietly, one little worry at a time.

“He’s been in our house all along,” Ashley whispered.

BATTLE CRY • You can be in the room and still miss the moment.



FIGHTING BACK

But Von and Ashley did not give up. They knew a God who gives back what the enemy steals.

Ashley lifted her Bible high and read it loud and clear. Then Von joined in: “This is the day the LORD has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24, NLT)

They began to thank God, out loud, for every good thing they could name. The Time Bandit blinked. The worry-clouds began to shrink. The shadows ran for the corners.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.”

Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • A thankful heart is a worry-proof heart.



THE KEY

The Time Bandit sighed. He knew he had been found out.

“Many have fallen for my tricks,” he said, “but few ever fight back. You’ve found the key: thankfulness and being present. Thank God for today, and be all there for the people you love. My worries can’t steal what you hold with a thankful heart.”

And as the lantern grew brighter and brighter, the old man faded away like morning fog.

BATTLE CRY • What you hold with thanks, the thief can’t take.



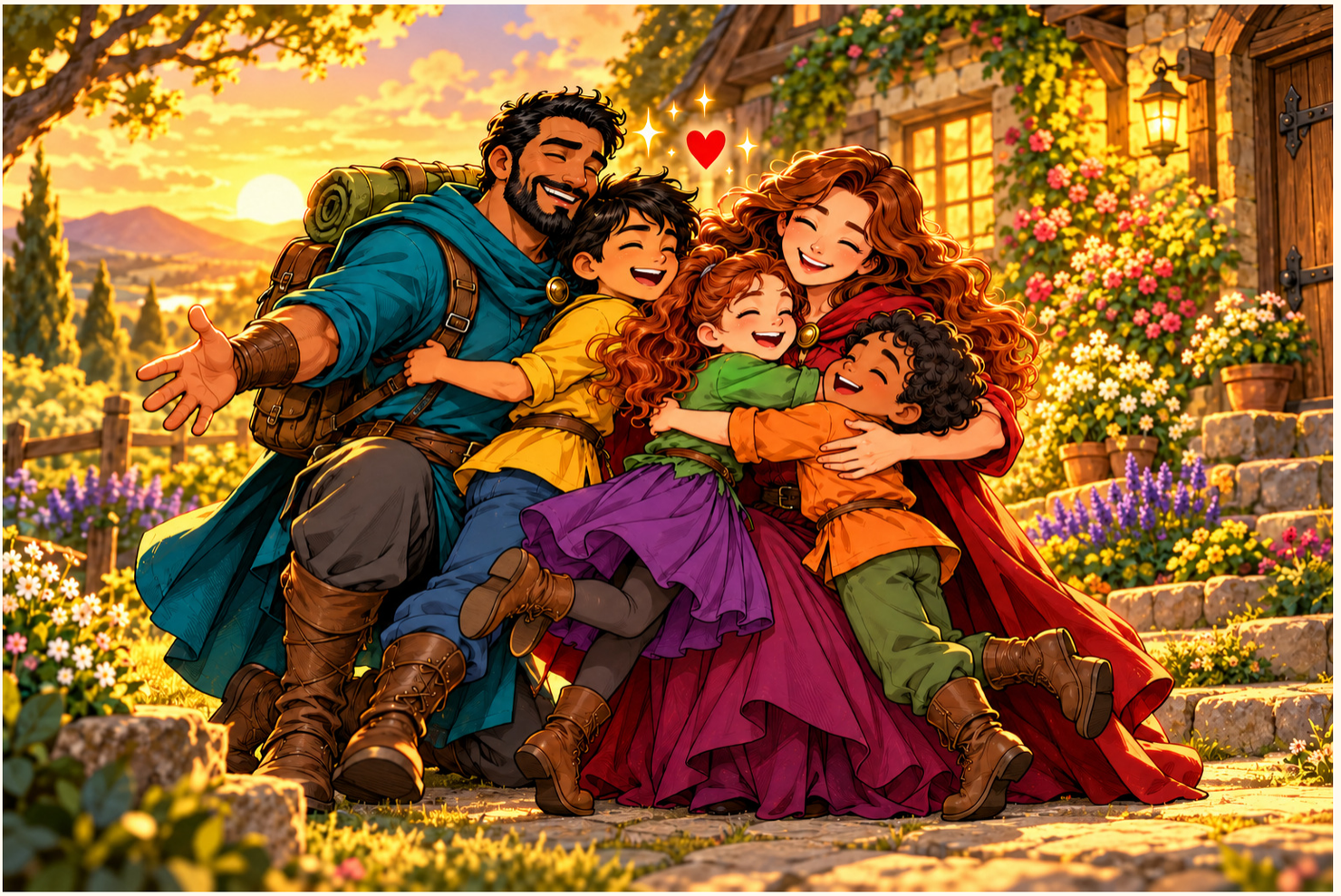
RACING HOME

Von and Ashley stepped out of the cave into bright sunshine. Their hearts felt light, like a backpack with all the rocks taken out.

Now they understood. The real battle was never against an old man in a cave. It was against the worries and fears that sneak in and steal the moments that matter most.

“Let’s go home,” Von said. And they did, faster than they had ever traveled before.

BATTLE CRY • When God shows you a wrong turn, turn around fast.



EVERY MOMENT COUNTS

When they got home, Jasper, Hazel and Micah came running, and Von and Ashley scooped them up in the biggest hug in the history of hugs.

From that day on, they made a promise. They would put down their worries and pick up their children. They would thank God for every ordinary day. They would listen, laugh, play and pray together.

And the Time Bandit? He never stole another minute from their family again.

“Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY • Time is a treasure. Spend it on the people you love.



BANDIT-BUSTER BATTLE PLAN

“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Matthew 6:34 (NLT) • Memory Verse

TALK ABOUT IT

1. What did the Mystery Bandit really steal? Why do you think nobody guessed it?

2. What are some “what if” worries the Time Bandit might whisper to a kid your age?

3. Why do you think shame keeps people quiet? Who is a safe person you can always tell the truth to?

4. Von and Ashley fought back with God’s Word and thankfulness. Which verse in this story would you want to remember?

5. What is one moment this week you want to really be present for?

MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT

Thank-You Tonight

Before bed, everyone names three things they’re thankful to God for today.

Worry Swap

When a worry shows up, say it out loud, then pray it to God together (Philippians 4:6).

“Watch This!” Promise

When someone in your family says “Watch this!”, stop and really watch.

Bandit-Free Dinner

One meal this week with no screens at the table. Just talk, laugh and listen.



KEEP YOUR LAMP BURNING

Jesus told a story about ten young women waiting with lamps for a wedding. Five brought extra oil and five did not. When the bridegroom came at midnight, the ones without oil tried to borrow some. But oil can’t be borrowed.

Your time works the same way. Nobody can fill your lamp for you. You fill it one thankful, present day at a time.

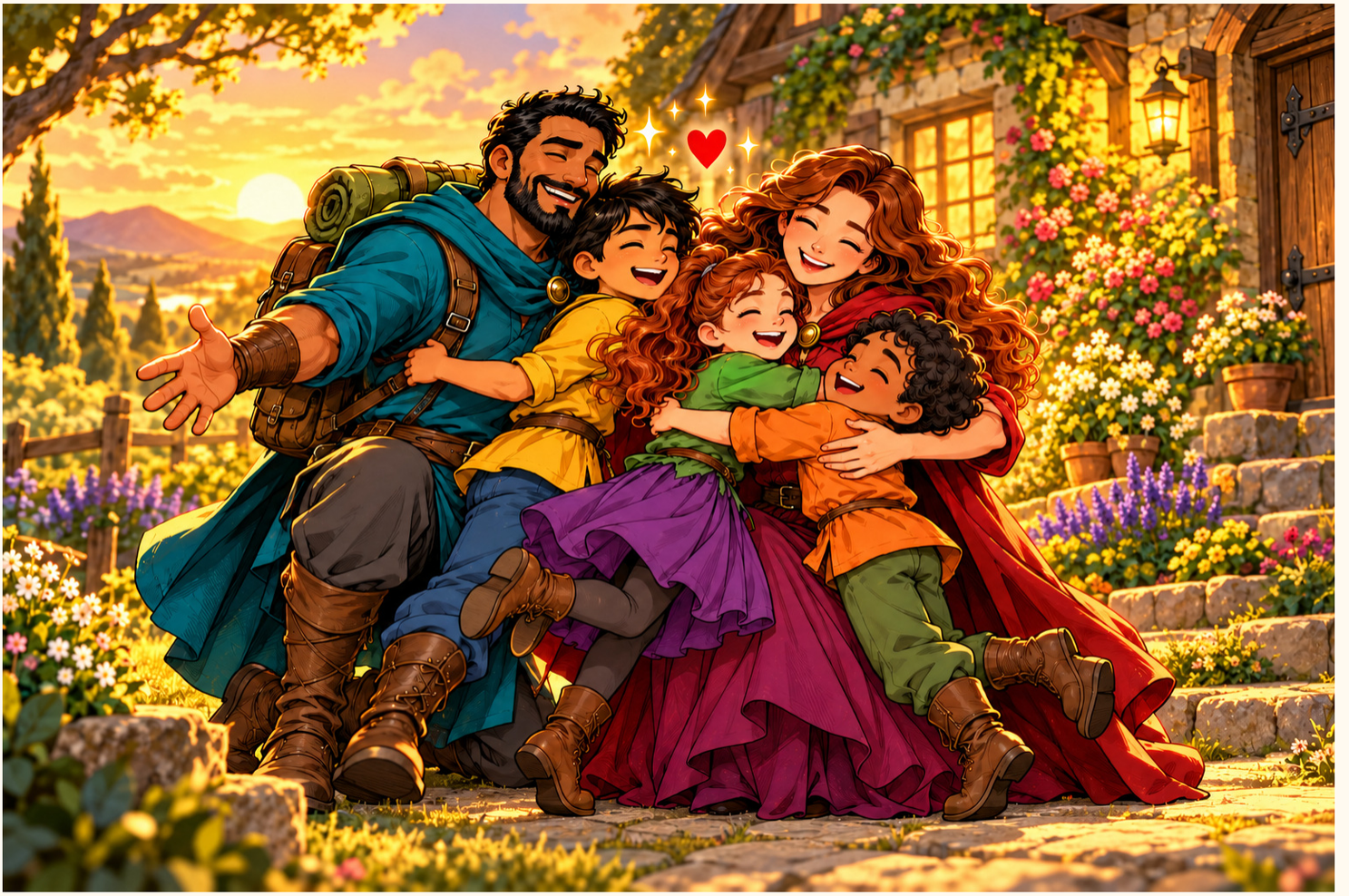
Can you find the season Von and Ashley walked through? (Hint: Recalculate.)

“but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil.”

Matthew 25:4 (NLT)

BATTLE CRY: Keep your lamp burning.

THE END



The Time Bandit is still out there, whispering “what if” to families everywhere. But now you know his secret. Stay thankful. Stay present. And guard your time like treasure.

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