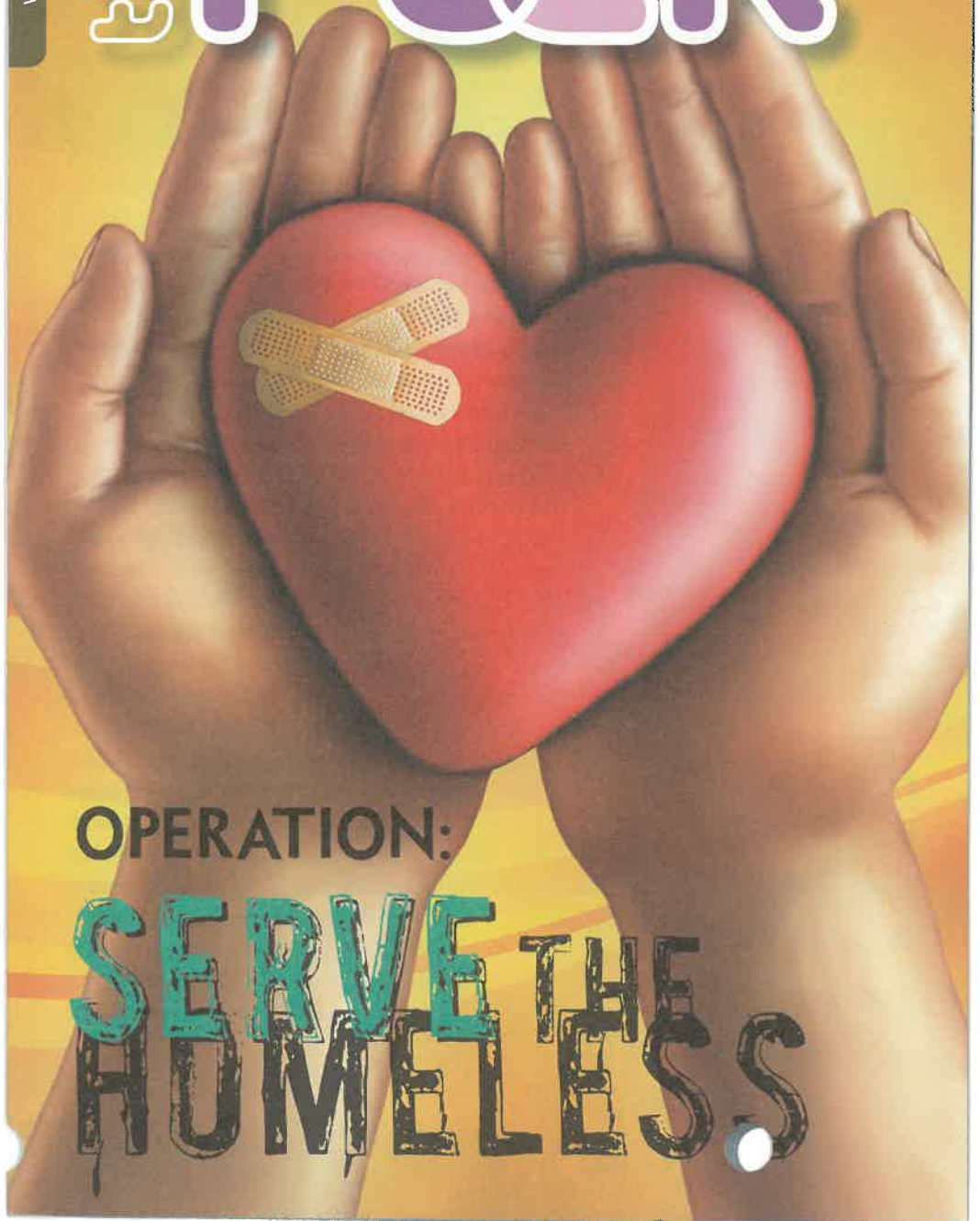


the rock



OPERATION:

SERVE THE HOMELESS.

OPERATION:

SERVE THE HOMELESS

A month ago at a youth group meeting Mr. Collins invited his group to help out at a homeless shelter serving food.

"It might help us understand the homeless a bit better," he commented.

Brandon didn't really want to go, but he started thinking about his recent Bible study on doing acts of service for people in need. If I can't even volunteer with other friends, what makes me think I'll be willing to help others on my own, he thought as he raised his hand along with Jake, Ella, Tristan and Carlos. I can do this. It's the least I can do. And so, four weeks later, Brandon, Jake, Ella, Tristan and Carlos met at the church for "Operation: Serve the Homeless."

"I hope you all brought a jacket," Mr. Collins announced. "We're walking the four blocks to the shelter. And we'll have to hurry because dinner is served in about an hour." It was freezing out, but the group didn't feel right complaining. They all had coats. Some of the people they would be serving might not even have a warm coat.

"You'll warm up after we've been

walking a bit. Let's go," Mr. Collins encouraged.

Twenty minutes later, the group arrived at the community shelter. A long line of people waited inside the door. The youth group was quickly ushered in. After they washed their hands, the group was instructed on how they could best serve this large group. Some would serve food in the line while others would mingle with the people being served. Brandon was chosen to mingle. "What am I going to talk about with these people," he asked Ella who also had the same assignment. "Just be friendly," she offered. "I'm sure they don't often get smiled at."

The meal consisted of vegetable soup, some bread, a red drink and a cookie, but no one complained.

People seemed so appreciative that Brandon felt his face flush. He had expected the shelter to be filled with old men. He was surprised that no one seemed older than 30.

Mostly there were single moms and their children.

"First time here?" a voice asked. Brandon turned to see another teen about his same age. "Uh, yeah, I'm Brandon."

"I'm Jason. My mom and my brother and me, come here to get a decent meal once in awhile. We only

stay overnight when we can't stay with family or friends."

"How long've you been coming here?" Brandon asked.

"Off and on for about three months. This place isn't too bad. Most of the toilets work and the showers are warm."

"I feel bad for you guys," Brandon mumbled. "I'm here to help out with some of my friends from youth group."

"Cool," Jason said. "Hopefully, next year my mom will have enough money saved to move us into an apartment. We're working with some of the staff here to make that happen. Most likely we won't need their help much longer."

Continued on page 6.

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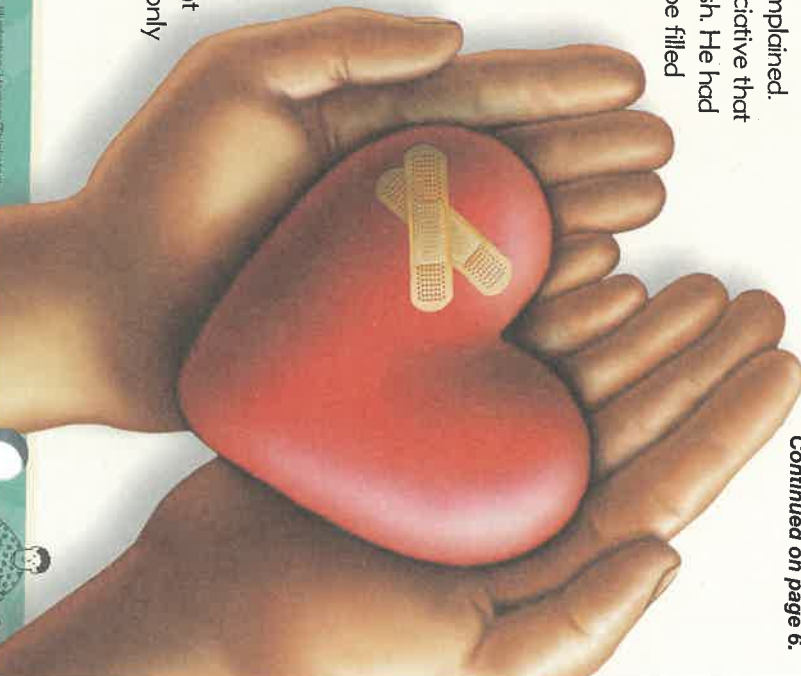
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GET

PREPARE

God showed over and over again that He is who He said He is—the awesome, compassionate, holy Creator. But some people just didn't get it. So He decided to "get real" in a big way. He confined His identity to flesh and blood and a baby-sized body, then grew and walked this earth so that everyone could see, in a very real way, what God is like.

Today's Scripture John 1:1-18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Bible Study

1. Pick out three key words in verses 1 and 2 that John uses to represent Jesus. Why did John choose those words?
2. What was Jesus' role in Creation?
3. If you had to give John the Baptist a job title, what would it be?
4. What does John say we have to do to become children of God?
5. How does Jesus show us what God is like?



OPERATION:

SERVE THE SERVILETS

Continued from page 3.

"Lord," Brandon half prayed, half complained later, "I feel so bad for Jason living here—especially during the holidays."

Suddenly Jesus' incarnation began to make more sense to Brandon. Christ gave up the riches of heaven so He could identify with our earthly struggles.

When it was time for Brandon and his youth group to leave, he gave his new friend Jason a wave. Coming here had helped him identify with a kid named Jason—and with Jesus. I guess that was the whole point, he thought: He couldn't wait to share what he'd learned with the rest of the group on the way home. Thankfully someone from the church was picking them up so they wouldn't have to walk back. Brandon thought about all he had and how serving had made him feel. "Mr. Collins, we'll have to get more kids to come with us next time!" Brandon offered.

QUESTIONS

* How have you served? How did that experience change you? What opportunities are there in your community for service? How might you go about serving others near you?

* What was it about Brandon's experience that helped him to identify more with Jason? With Jesus?

CHRIST GAVE UP THE RICHES OF HEAVEN SO HE COULD IDENTIFY WITH OUR EARTHLY STRUGGLES.



The setting for this crime is the central African rain forests. There on the dank, dark mat of the forest floor is some slippery goo that makes its way slowly through organic debris looking for something to devour.

Fear not! Although most of us feel creepy about this kind of stuff, this particular goo is not dangerous to humans. In fact, it is made up of single-cell slime molds and is barely visible to the naked eye. It is an essential part of the forest food chain.

Slime molds eat the bacteria that feed on decaying plant matter in the forest. They then become food for worms, which in turn become food for higher creatures, such as birds. Scientists say it is possible that the whole system of life in the rain forest would break down without slime molds.

So why are humans killing off these innocent little slimes? Slime molds die when people use bulldozers or slash-and-

burn techniques to clear the forest. When land is burned, the molds may disappear for up to six years, making it difficult for the forest to regenerate itself and support the many kinds of life found there.

When land is bulldozed, the slime molds may never return. Some people think it is a crime to destroy the forest. Others say they need the land for crops.

When God created people, He instructed us to take care of the earth. Unfortunately, when we sin there are consequences to us, people around us, and in plants and animals.

But as Christians we should care for the earth. You can get involved by reading up on the ecology and the environment at the library, and helping in local environmental programs. Even though you're not of voting age, you can still let your government representatives know what you think about this issue. You can find their addresses at your local library or on the Web.

THE VILAINS! HUMAN BEINGS! THE VICTIMS! SLIME!

every day devos

One & Only

Find out how Jesus, "the one and only Son," has made God known to us.

"No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."
John 1:18

MONDAY

Get out some pictures of people in your family. Jot down a list of resemblances that you see. Now list ways that you reflect the image of your heavenly Father.

TUESDAY

Find a quiet place to go through the greeting cards your family has received. Sort out the ones that say something about Jesus. What characteristics of God's only Son do they bring out? Design your own card based on John 1:14.

WEDNESDAY

Ask Mom or Dad to show you your birth certificate or baby album. Look at the tiny footprints. Say a prayer of thanks that Jesus was willing to be born in a body like yours.

THURSDAY

Read John 1:10. Think of some people close to you who have not recognized Jesus for who He is. Pray for them. Plan a way to explain your faith in Christ to one of them.

FRIDAY

Read John 1:16. What are some of the blessings you have received? Write them on a sheet of paper and hang it in your room.

SATURDAY

Read John 20:29. Close your eyes and ask Jesus to help you know Him better.

