

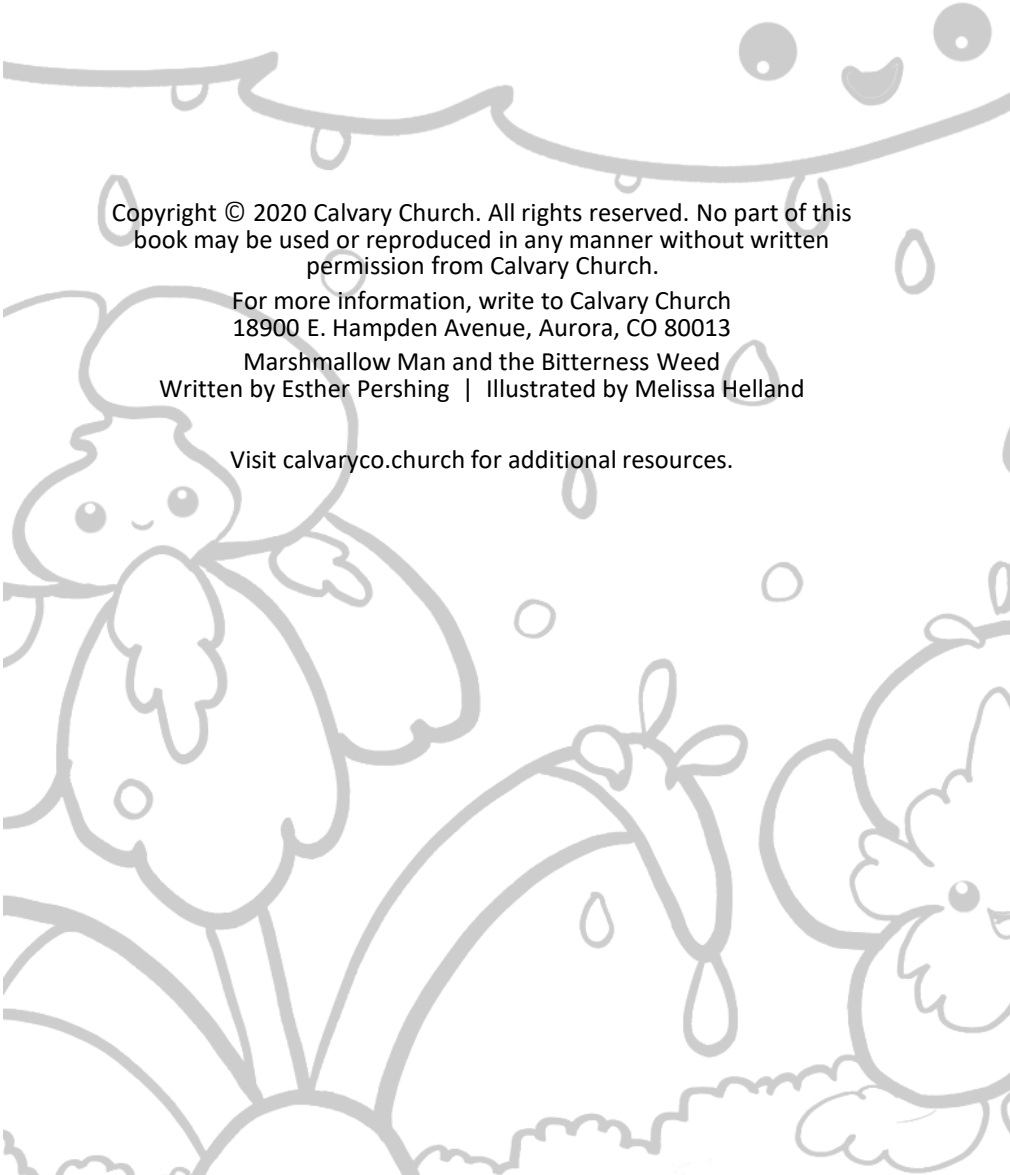


# Marshmallow Man<sup>gellow</sup>



and **THE BITTERNESS WEED**

a STORY by ESTHER PERSHING



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Marshmallow Man and the Bitterness Weed

Written by Esther Pershing | Illustrated by Melissa Helland

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# **MARSHMALLOW MAN**

and **THE BITTERNESS WEED**

BY **ESTHER PERSHING**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**MELISSA HELLAND**

## Marshmallow Man

Marshmallow Man lives in the town of Sweet Gardens. He and his friends are made of pretzel sticks and marshmallows. His family and friends call him "Marsh" because Marshmallow Man is just too long. Marsh is a lot like us, and he has family and friends in Sweet Gardens. He has feelings too, and they get him into trouble sometimes. Even so, Marshmallow Man really *wants* to obey Jesus.

Marshmallow Man lives in a neat little stone cottage. Everybody does. There are stones everywhere. Marshmallow Man has a garden in front of his house. He grows all kinds of flowers and some fruit - like strawberries. But the best part of his garden is a spring. It flows pure, cool water that tastes delicious and helps the plants to grow.

Marshmallow Man had a problem. He kept getting hurt by everyone. He was quite sore and his feelings kept getting bruised. The town bully, Billy Mallow, loved marshmallows and weeds, and kept pulling off parts of him for he was nice and sweet.

Next, it was Mike Mallow. He used to come over and talk. But the last time he poked Marshmallow Man with sharp sticks and called him names.

Then Grannie Mallow stopped coming over on her way to the grocery store. He missed her but figured she just didn't care anymore and had started taking a different way home.

Daisy Mallow, his own sister, always wore a daisy in her hair. She borrowed Marshmallow Man's skates and said she would return them, but never did.

Worst of all, Billy Mallow (the Bully) had gotten into his garden and trampled all the flowers and strawberries. He even put stones and mud in his spring.

Marshmallow Man sighed.

Marshmallow Man was hurting. He decided that he just couldn't let anyone hurt him again, so he began to build walls around his cottage and garden.

He built them high so nobody could get in and hurt him. His idea worked.

He had been so busy hurting and building the walls that he had forgotten to take care of his garden. Marshmallow Man began to tidy up the messed-up garden and spring.

The flowers were all askew. Weeds had grown up everywhere! The spring barely bubbled up sludge. As Marshmallow Man cleaned, he muttered to himself.

"They were so mean. Ouch! That still hurts. I'll never let them taste my spring again."

"That meanie Billy the Bully! It will take me forever to clean up this mess."

It took several days but Marshmallow Man cleaned up his garden. He noticed that the flowers didn't seem to blossom as well, and the spring flowed better, but was not as tasty as before. It was bitter.



MARSH'S COTTAGE

## A Talk With God

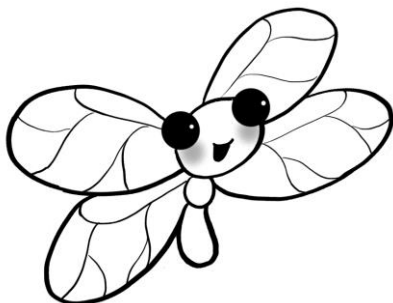
Sometime later, Marshmallow Man was sitting on his new garden bench. It always seemed dark except at noon now. His garden hadn't returned to what it was.

Marshmallow Man began to read his Bible again. He had stopped for a while but missed it now. He opened it up to the New Testament, and began to read in Matthew.

Marsh liked reading about Jesus. He just kept reading. Then, a part of a verse stuck in his thoughts.

"Love your neighbor as yourself..." He stopped to think about that. He thought, "Who was his neighbor, and *how* was he to love them?"

Speaking of neighbors...Marshmallow Man realized that he hadn't seen or heard any of them since he built the wall.





On the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the month, Marshmallow Man was reading in his Bible Proverbs 18. He stopped at the first verse and thought, "I am lonely." Nobody had stopped by and he hadn't been outside of his tall wall in a very long time. Sometimes he climbed a ladder and looked over his wall. Nobody seemed to notice that he wasn't around anymore.

Marshmallow Man looked at his garden, it was slowly dying. The flowers didn't like the bitter water. He checked the spring again.

"Wait! What is that?!" He exclaimed. He saw that a plant had started to grow right beside the spring, practically in it.

Marsh plucked off a leaf and sniffed. Ugh! It smelled terrible. He tasted it... bitter. "So, YOU are the cause of my spring to be bad," declared Marshmallow Man.

Marshmallow Man tried to pull it up. Nope, just a few stinky leaves came off. He couldn't spray it. The weed spray would make the spring worse. Marsh thought for a minute...he had a shovel. He would dig it up.

After an hour of digging, he still couldn't get it out. The root was just too deep. All the hard work had only caused the plant to grow!

Marshmallow Man slumped on his bench and sighed. "What is this plant? It seems to thrive in the gloom."

"Marsh...?" a still quiet voice sounded in his heart. Marshmallow Man hadn't been listening to that voice in a long time.

"Yes, God... I hear you."

"That weed is bitterness. It began to grow when you started building the high walls. It is very hard to get rid of it and it will take time."

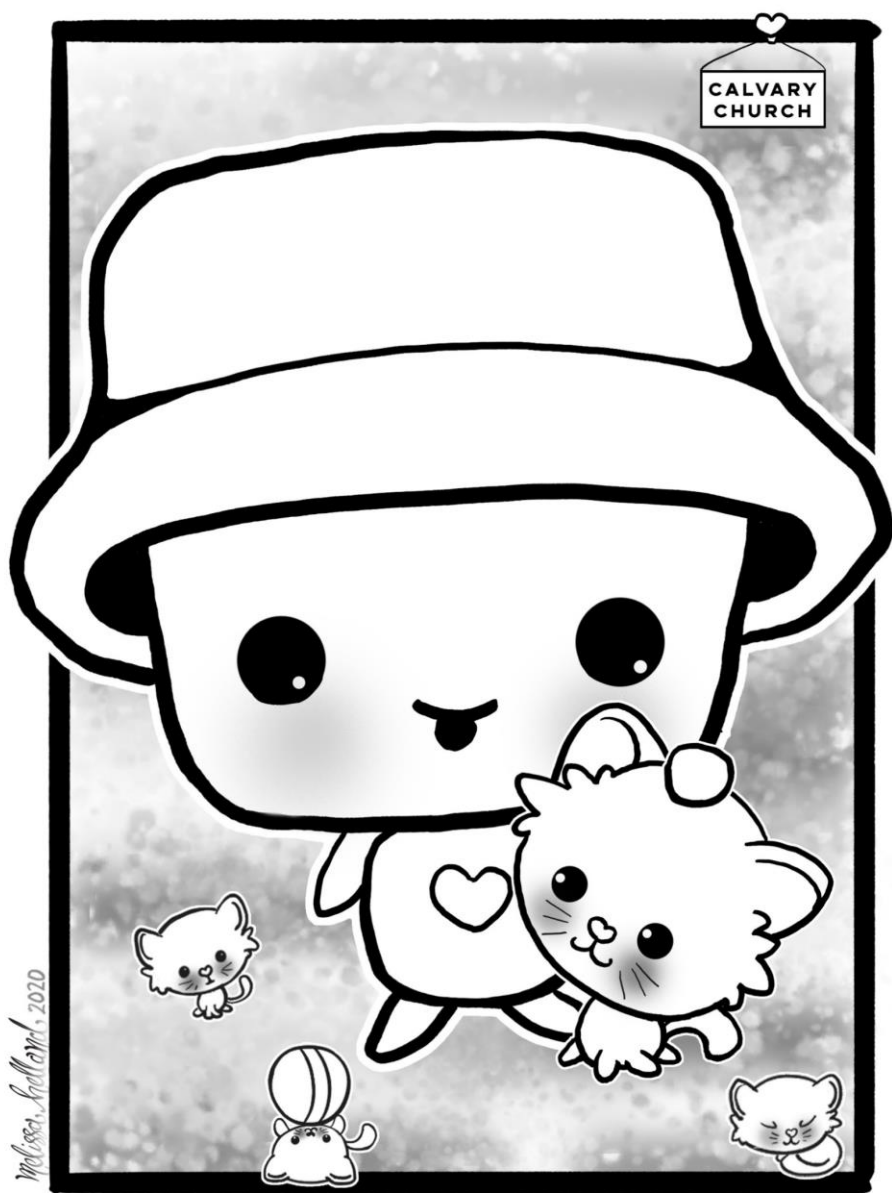
"Please understand Me. I never wanted you to have high walls. I *want* you to talk to your neighbors and show them My love."

Marshmallow Man thought. Yes, he knew it would be nice to see people again. Oh, but would they hurt me again?

"Probably," whispered God. "Please remember that you are in My hands and nothing comes in that I don't allow. I *use* the hurts to help make you more like Jesus."

Marshmallow Man thought about the life of Jesus in the Bible. He had people hurt Him, but He didn't hide.

"I will help you take down these walls. My letter to you contains the tools you will need to bring them down."



Melissa Sullivan, 2020

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MARSH'S CAT

## Mike Mallow

Early the next morning, Marshmallow Man climbed up on his ladder and began taking down the walls one stone at a time. He had been reading the Bible all night and had the tools to take them down.

It took a while, but they came down. He made them visiting height, low enough to say "hello" to the people passing on the road and tall enough to grow ivy. He even put in a special swinging gate between his house and Mike Mallow's.

Marshmallow Man had just sat down on his garden bench to rest with a big glass of spring water. He looked around. Everything seemed to be doing better. His flowers were perking up and it just seemed brighter and cooler. Then he heard the gate swing open...

"Marshmallow!" bellowed Mike. "I want to talk to you."

Marshmallow Man prayed, "Jesus help me, protect me as you promised."

Mike strode around the cottage to the garden. "Wow! I like it. Especially that gate. That tall wall reminded me every day that I was wrong and mean to poke you with that stick and call you "puffy". I came right over just as soon as I saw the new gate to ask you to forgive me. Will you?"

Marshmallow Man had read in his Bible that morning that we should forgive others as God has forgiven us. "Yes!" Marshmallow Man firmly replied. Suddenly he felt a little lighter.

"I sure miss that clear cool water," Mike said.

"Let me get you a glass. Have a seat on my bench." Marshmallow Man quickly got another glass and filled it to the brim. "It isn't as sweet as it used to be. I have a weed that is making it taste bitter, but it is drinkable." As he turned to Mike, he noticed that the bitterness weed had lost *four* leaves and had shrunk *two* whole inches.

"Come over anytime for a glass." Marshmallow Man said as he sat down beside Mike. "I miss our visits."



Melissa Holland, 2020

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MIKE MALLOW AND FRIENDS

## Grannie Mallow

Grannie Mallow shuffled to a stop and sighed. The groceries were extra heavy today and she had a long walk to get home. She pulled off her yellow scarf and wiped her face. "Oh, for a glass of water!" she said tiredly.

Marshmallow Man had been on his pretzel knees weeding his garden and planting some daisies. He got up to get a drink himself and saw Grannie in the middle of the road starting to pick up the heavy grocery bags.

"Grannie!" called Marshmallow Man. "Come into the garden and rest on my bench. I will bring in your groceries and get you some water." Marshmallow Man hurried out to the road and picked up the heavy bags. Then he ran inside for two glasses.

"This place looks nice without those walls," Grannie said after a long drink. "Sure did miss seeing you."

"You hadn't been by in so long I thought you had decided to go a different way." Marshmallow Man said with a puzzled look on his face.

"No," said Grannie, feeling a little stronger. "I've been sick and haven't been able to walk to the store."

Marsh felt bad. He would have known this if he hadn't built that wall. "I'm sorry, Grannie. I didn't know. Please forgive me."

"Yes, my boy." Grannie smiled. "I better go now. I have a long way to walk."

Marshmallow Man suddenly remembered the verse from church... "Be kind to one another."

Suddenly, he thought of something – the swinging gate!

"Grannie!" he said excitedly. "I put in a special gate in the back wall. You live next to Mike Mallow, and using it would make it only half as far to go, and you could get a drink and rest."

Grannie rubbed the dirt off his head and said. "Oh, that would be wonderful."

"Let me carry your bags for you."  
Marshmallow Man grabbed the bags and led the way to the gate.

As he turned to walk away, he noticed that his spring was louder. The bitterness weed had shrunk even more.





Melissa Ballantyne, 2021

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GRANNIE AND PUP

## Daisy Mallow

One day, a few weeks later, Marshmallow Man was returning home from carrying Grannie's groceries. He was happy to know that she was feeling better.

Suddenly he heard this cry...then a thump, and an "Ouch!" coming from the front of the cottage. He hurried around to see what had happened.

Daisy Mallow lay sprawled out on the road. Her daisy, which she always wore in her hair, had been knocked out and smooshed. She began to cry. Her right arm had been badly chipped. Marshmallow Man rushed out to help.

"I came to return your skates." She wailed. "I would have come sooner but that big wall scared me." She took in a short gasp. "I tripped on that rock and now my arm really hurts."

"Let me help you to my garden where you can sit and rest." Marshmallow Man helped her to her feet and scooped up the skates. They walked slowly to the garden bench.

Once there, Marshmallow Man filled a glass of clear water for her. After giving it to her, he went inside to get a clean cloth to wash her arm.

When he returned, she was just crying a little. "Let me clean your arm," Marsh said gently. He began cleaning away the dirt and small rocks. He frowned. "This is going to need a splint." He said. Daisy began to cry harder.

"It hurts, Marsh. Can't you do something?" she whimpered.

Marshmallow Man thought. He hadn't been shopping and had just eaten his last marshmallow that morning. He knew that Grannie didn't have any. They were too sweet for her. Mike didn't like the "puffy" things. He could go to the store, but that would take a while.

Then he remembered his verse, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted..." He knew Daisy was really hurting but what could he do?

A small thought popped into his head. "You are a marshmallow. Pull off a piece of yourself and fix her arm."

"But God, that will hurt!" Marshmallow Man prayed.

"Yes." God answered, "But remember that I allow hurts to make you more like Jesus. Also, you are still in my hands. This is what I want."

"Ok..." prayed Marshmallow Man.

Well, if he was to be tender-hearted then that was where he would take the marshmallow out - from his chest. Quickly, before he could talk himself out of it, he grabbed two handfuls of marshmallow from his chest. "Ouch," he said quietly.

Marshmallow Man stretched the pieces and placed them around Daisy's arm.

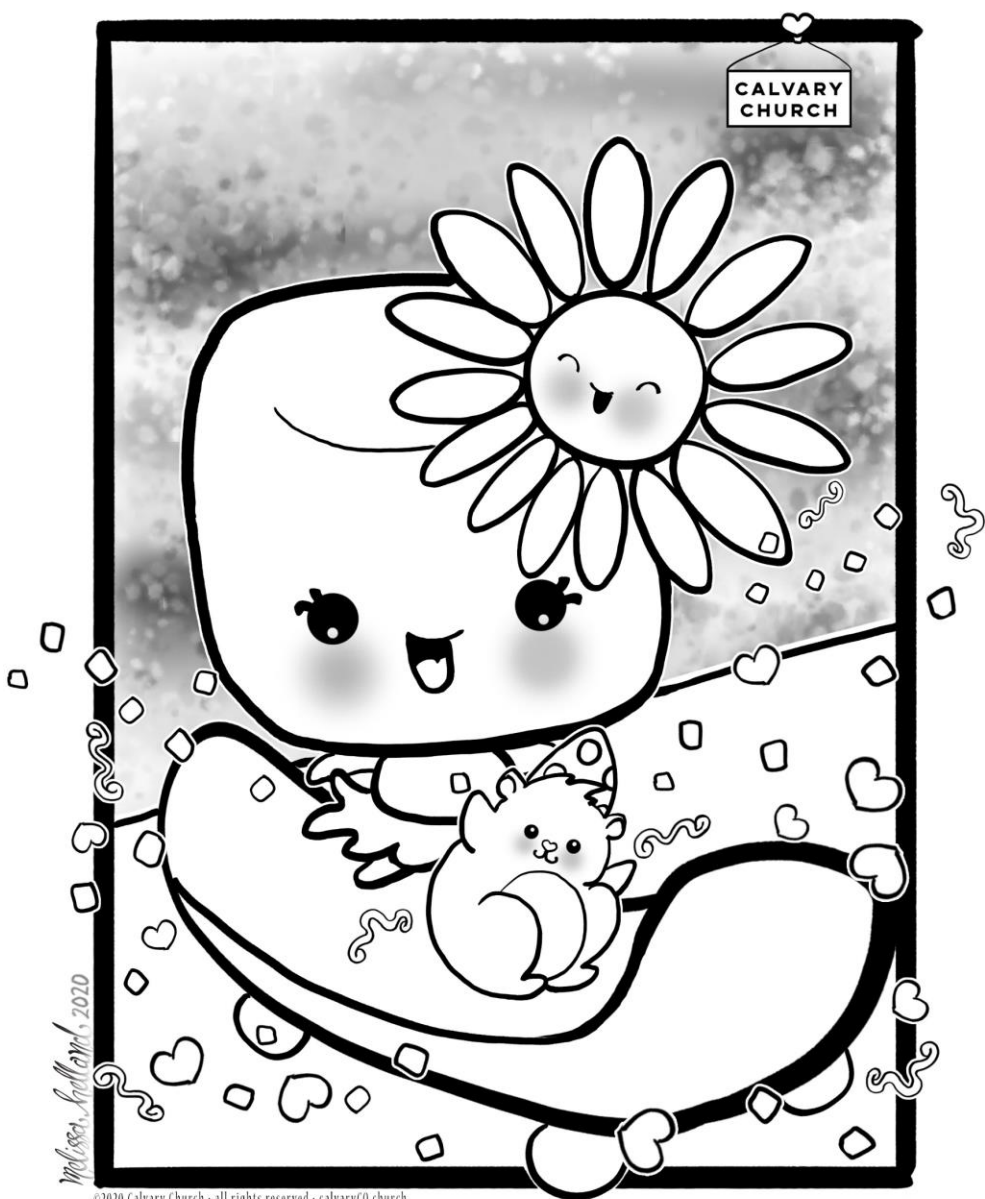
"Oh," she sighed. "That feels better. But now you have a heart-shaped piece missing from your chest!"

"It's not bad. It doesn't hurt much, and it helped you."

Marsh looked at Daisy and grinned. "You are missing something." He laughed.

Marshmallow Man walked over to the bunch of daisies and plucked the first blossom off the stem. He came over and brushed the dirt off her nose, straightened her hair, and poked in the daisy by her ear.

Marshmallow Man stepped over to the spring to wash and soothe the hole. He noticed that the weed of bitterness was smaller and the water almost clear again.



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DAISY ON HER BIRTHDAY

## Billy The Bully

Marshmallow Man sighed. He was trying to dig up the bitterness weed again. He noticed that it was growing again.

"Marsh!" Mike boomed as he swung open the swinging gate. "I came to talk for a little while and get a drink of water."

Marshmallow Man slumped on the bench. "It's getting more bitter." He said. "It is this weed! I can't get rid of it!" Marshmallow Man was frustrated.

Mike filled two glasses with water. He handed one to Marsh and sat down beside him on the bench. "You are puffier than normal," Mike observed.

"I get puffy when I get warm." Marshmallow Man said. "I've been puffy a lot lately."

"What's got you all heated up? I've noticed you aren't as patient, kind, and loving as you had been." Mike asked.

"It's my garden!" Marshmallow Man exclaimed. "Billy the Bully came in a while ago and sowed weeds everywhere and cluttered up my spring with mud and stones. I'm still pulling out his weeds!"

Marshmallow Man puffed up so big he pushed Mike right off the bench!

Marshmallow Man wobbled over to the spring and filled a bucket with water. With a big swing, he sloshed the water all over himself. He began to shrink and get firmer. Sploosh! Another bucket full. He checked himself.

"Almost there. One more." Marshmallow Man filled the bucket again and doused himself once more. "Ah, that's better."

Marsh looked over at Mike. He was just dusting himself off.

"But that happened a long time ago," Mike said as he sat back down. "Haven't you forgiven him for it?"

"No."

"Marsh," he said. "That root of bitterness wasn't planted by Billy. *You* planted it when you refused to forgive him and the rest of us. It got smaller as you loved and forgave all of us. Now you're holding on to it, and are helping it to grow as you keep bringing up the mess.

Say, how has your special time with God been?"

Marsh plopped down on the bench beside Mike. "Now that you bring it up, it has felt rather dull. I pray, but it seems that God doesn't hear."

"In the Bible, Psalm 66:18 says if you don't admit your sin, the Lord doesn't hear you," Mike replied. "And Jesus said that when we pray, we should ask God to forgive us like we forgive others."

Marsh thought about that. "Forgive as God has forgiven you." popped into his head. His verse! Marshmallow Man paused and then prayed,

"Dear God, I have sinned. I have been unforgiving, angry, and bitter about Billy. Please forgive me." A smile erupted on Marsh's face.

"I have to go talk to Billy." he said.

"Aren't you afraid of him?" Mike asked.

"He was the one who would eat you."

"No. I know God is with me." Marsh called back as he walked down the road.



Billy had just come out of his castle with weed seeds to scatter. He saw Marsh and stopped. "So, want to lose more of yourself?" Billy sneered. "Looks like someone already did. Ha!"

"I came to tell you that I forgive you for ruining my garden and to thank you. What you did hurt, but God made it so now I have a better, more beautiful garden and a clear spring to share. I also want to ask you to forgive me for being so angry and bitter towards you." Marsh explained.

Billy Mallow was quiet for a moment then blurted out, "I'll never forgive you and will keep trying to ruin your garden." He dropped the seeds and started toward Marsh. "I'm going to eat you!"

Marsh turned and nimbly ran away to his garden.

"Good job, my son. Now let's pull out that root." Marsh heard God say in his heart.

He went over and gave the bitterness root a giant YANK...and OUT came the root. He threw it away and got glasses for him and Mike.

"Never tasted better!" Mike said.

"Um humph!" said Marsh, taking a gulp.



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MARSH'S BLOOMS

## Sandwiches Or Sludge?

Sometime later Marshmallow Man was bustling around in his garden. He was having a party that night. Pieces of wood and stone were scattered everywhere. Mike came over to help.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked loudly.

"You can arrange the wood in the fire pit. I'm trying to get this big flat stone on top of the other two, so we have enough bench room for everybody to sit." Marsh huffed as he hefted the big stone up. Kwak!

Marshmallow Man looked up. Billy Mallow was trying to throw weed seeds over the wall. He even threw a small stone. "Hello, Billy." Marsh smiled.

"Humph," wheezed Billy, then he wobbled off to his castle.

"Does he do that often?" asked Mike.

"Every day...I feel sad for him. He is so puffed up with anger and bitterness he can barely walk. The seeds land mostly on the other side of the wall and sometimes the stones make it over. God lets just enough of Billy's seeds to sprout to keep me on my knees. The stones he throws I place by the spring to remind me to pray for Billy." Marsh grinned.

Mike was concerned. "Aren't you afraid Billy will destroy your garden and possibly hurt you again?"

"No," said Marsh between gulps of water. Lifting that heavy stone had made him warm and a little puffy. "Billy is too big to come through either gate and too wobbly to climb the wall. It is all he can do to carry the seeds and a stone or two. I can easily outrun him now."

A few hours later, Marshmallow Man had the fire going nicely.

Daisy burst through the front gate. "I'm so excited!" She shouted out loud. "My Lemon Daisies have bloomed, See!" Daisy pointed to her ear where a pale-yellow daisy was stuck. "Oh, and here are the long sticks you wanted."

Mike and Grannie came around the cottage.

"I brought the graham crackers," Mike said.

"What are *they* for?"

"You'll see," Marsh said with a smile.

"Remember, don't get those chocolate bars too close to this fire. They'll melt!" Grannie hollered as she sank to sit on the new bench beside Daisy.

"Daisy, my bees are going to love those lemon daisies of yours," Mike said.

"Ok, here we are." Marsh brought out a tray with all the items and set it down between the benches.

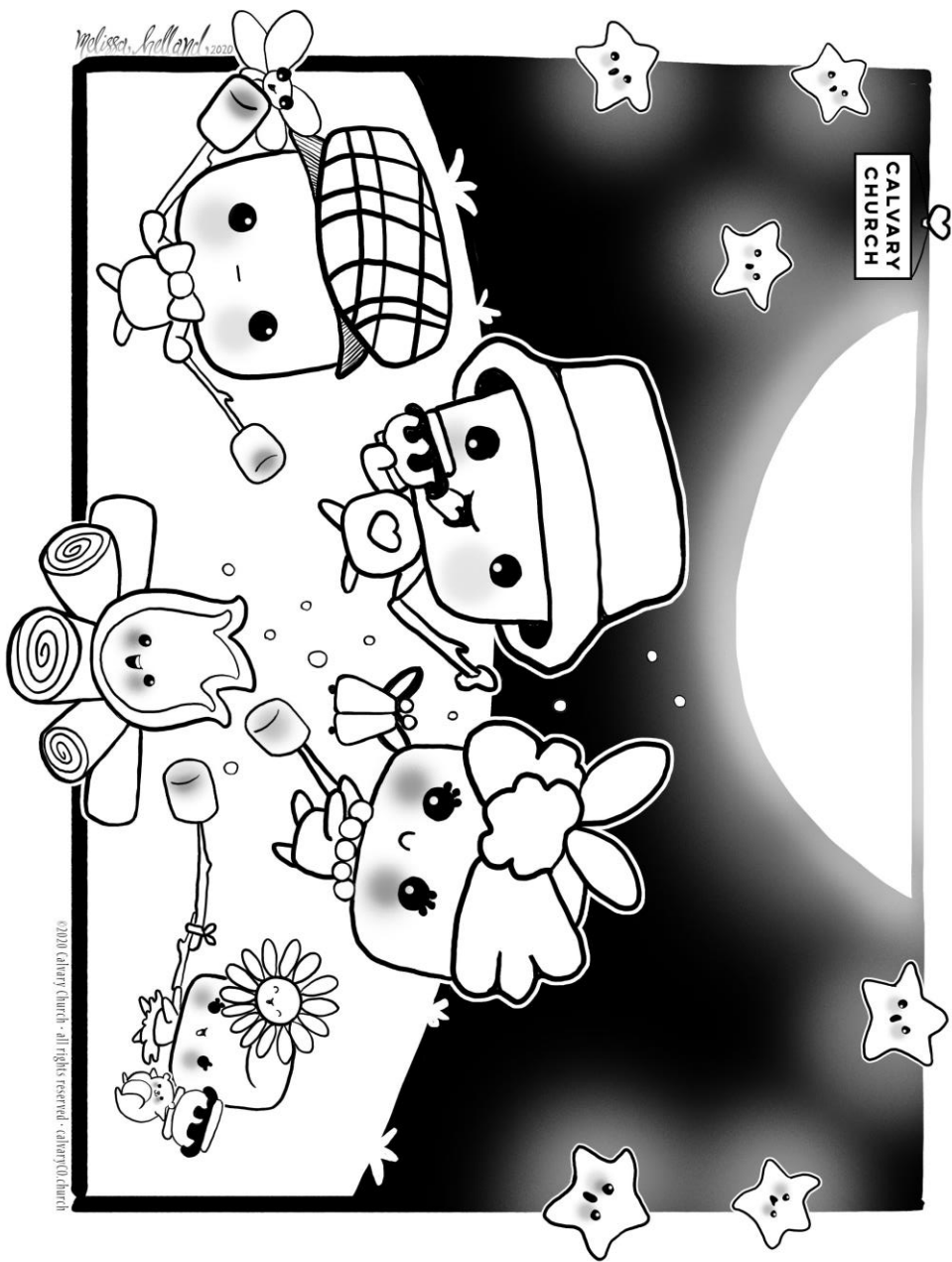
"This is a sandwich. Take a marshmallow and poke the end of the stick in it. Hold the marshmallow close to the fire. It will toast. Get the graham cracker ready and put some chocolate on it. As soon as your marshmallow is brown, bring it to you. Put it between the graham cracker and the chocolate and squeeze gently while you pull out the stick...eat it while the marshmallow is gooey!"

The four laughed and talked. They had a good time and decided that they would have s'mores again.

Billy the Bully heard their laughter and smelled the smoke. A tiny part of him wanted to be there too.

"Humph!" he squashed the thought and grumped...as he scooped up another cup of sludge.

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# Activities

Dear Parent/ Teacher,

Welcome to the world of *Sweet Gardens*. The Bible often refers to our lives and selves as gardens. This is the story about a garden.

There are two ways to use this story: All at one time; or have each chapter as a lesson to be taught once a week, or once a day. Here are the Bible scriptures referenced in each chapter - also included are craft/snack ideas.

## **Chapter 1-** Marshmallow Man

*John 4:14, Galatians 5:15, Ephesians 4:29, James 1:27, Proverbs 4:23*

Craft/Snack: Build Marsh (5 short pretzel sticks, 1 and ½ large mallows, 4 mini mallows) assemble a figure with legs, feet, arms, hands neck and head. Older kids can use food coloring and a toothpick/cotton swab to draw on a face.

## **Chapter 2-** God is my Protection

*Matthew 22:39, Luke 10:29, Ephesians 4:32, Proverbs 18:1, Hebrews 12:14-15, John 10:27-30, 2 Corinthians 10:4*

Snack: Graham cracker walls – with frosting?

## **Chapter 3-** Mike Mallow

*Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32, Matt. 5:23-24, Hebrews 10:25*

Craft: Draw a picture of what you think Mike looks like.

## **Chapter 4- Grannie Mallow**

*Ephesians 4:32, James 1:27, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

Snack: Make Grannie. Like Marsh only stooped over and has a triangle of American cheese for a scarf. Once again, older kids can draw faces.

## **Chapter 5- Daisy Mallow**

*Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Cor. 13:1-7*

Craft: Draw 4 long ovals over the top of each other in a simple flower shape. Have the kids color them and cut them out of the paper. Take a bamboo skewer and push it up through the center of the flower from the bottom. Older kids or adults can push on a Hershey kiss for the center. Make several for a bouquet for someone. A mallow skewered behind the paper petals may hold them in place well.

## **Chapter 6- Billy the Bully**

*Ephesians 4:31-32, Hebrews 12:15, Psalm 66:18, Matthew 6:12, Genesis 50:19*

Project: Adult may place large mallow on a plate, and put in microwave. Set on high for 1 minute or less. Have the kids watch the mallow grow big and puffy (20-25 seconds?). They will also see that it deflates as soon as cooler air gets to it.

## **Chapter 7- Sandwiches or Sludge**

*Matthew 5:44*

Snacks: To show as example, or representing the behavior of the kids - if loving, caring, forgiving - they'll get smores; if angry, resentful - then 'sludge' (hot chocolate with bitter flavorings, like almonds or coffee or molasses.)



# Encouragements

If you are presenting this story over a longer period, the kids may plant some fast germinating seeds like Marigolds to see how they grow.



Suggested memory verses:

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

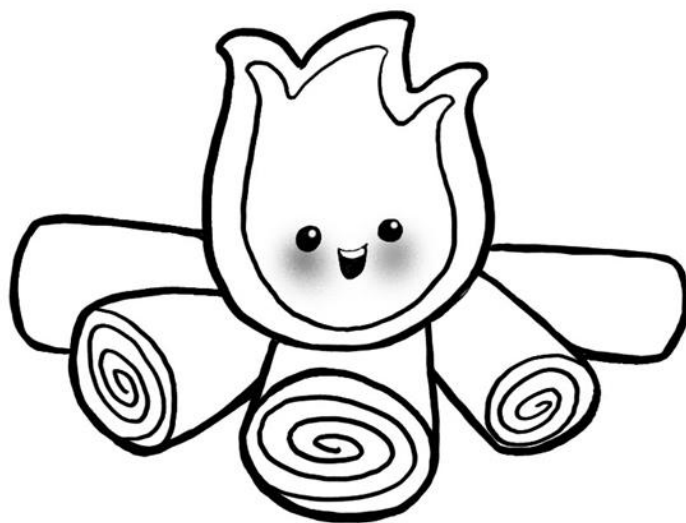
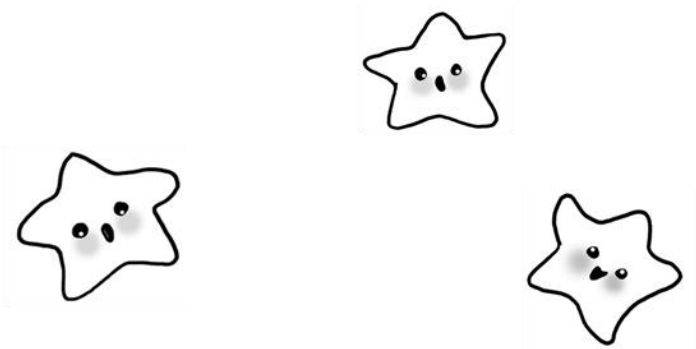
Ephesians 4:31-32 (NKJV)

*Love is patient and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)

May God bless you as you share the principles of scripture with children.

Esther Pershing



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