

# A Squirrel's Tale

**H**igh up in the tallest branches of the giant oak tree that grew in Rusty's backyard lived a family of fluffy gray squirrels. Each evening, right before supper, Rusty and his father would watch the furry creatures scurry up and down the trunk of the tree collecting the walnuts Dad had placed on the ground.

"I bet I could train one of those squirrels to take a nut from my hand," Rusty bragged to his dad. "Maybe if he got used to me, he'd even let me pet him."

"That wouldn't be a very good idea, son," Dad explained. "As friendly as squirrels seem to be, they are still wild animals and could bite you, especially if they were frightened. And if they happened to be sick, they could give you a bad disease. Then we'd have to take you to the hospital for shots, and you know how you hate shots."

"But I wouldn't scare them. I'd stay very still," Rusty insisted.



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"No, son. Leave the squirrels alone. Don't feed them without me." Dad tossed the last of the walnuts toward the tree. "Time to go inside for supper. Mom's making homemade pizza tonight."



At the mention of his favorite meal, Rusty's stomach growled. "Yum! I'm sure hungry. How about you, Dad?"

"You bet!"

"Race you to the back door!" Rusty shouted as he took off running. He thundered onto the back porch and slammed against the screen door. "Beat ya!" Rusty laughed.

"Not by much." Huffing and puffing, Dad charged onto the porch. "But you had a head start!"

"Fair and square, Dad," Rusty laughed, "'cause you have longer legs."

Rusty opened the screen door and bounded into the kitchen. "Umm, the pizza smells yummy."

"Not as good as my favorite cherry pie," Dad exclaimed as he kissed Mom on the cheek. "You've been busy this afternoon."



She laughed and playfully swatted Dad with the dishtowel. "Go on now. Hurry and wash up. The pizza just came out of the oven."

All evening Rusty could think of nothing else but the squirrels. Oh, how fun it would be to train at least one of them to eat from his hand. The more he thought about it, the more determined he became to try. As he lay on his bed in the dark, he

developed a plan he knew would work.

The next morning, after Dad left for the office, Mom was sorting the dirty clothes that needed washing, when Rusty sauntered into the laundry

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room and casually asked his mother if he could feed the squirrels. Busy scrubbing grass stains off of Rusty's pants, Mom only half heard his question. "Sure, honey. Be careful."

"Thanks, Mom!" Rusty ran from the laundry room before Mom could change her mind. In the kitchen, he opened the freezer door and removed the bag of walnuts from the freezer. He opened the bag and scooped out a handful and stuffed them into his pockets. After putting the bag back in the freezer, Rusty looked down the hall to make sure Mom wasn't watching, and then quickly ran outside. The screen door slammed behind him, sending the gray squirrels scurrying up the trunk of the tree.

Rusty felt a thrill of anticipation as he made a trail of nuts from the trunk of the tree to the house and then waited on the porch steps for the squirrels to come to him. And come they did! One at a time, they darted for the nuts, coming closer and closer to where Rusty sat. To his delight, the littlest squirrel, his favorite, was also the bravest. To retrieve the last few walnuts, the tiniest squirrel inched closer and closer. Barely daring to breathe, Rusty held the last walnut between his fingers. *Would the squirrel take it?*

The squirrel stopped less than six inches from Rusty's hand. The animal glanced first in one direction and then the other. He looked at the nut and then the boy. Without taking his eyes off Rusty, the squirrel inched closer and closer. Just as the squirrel extended his neck to take the nut out of Rusty's fingers, a noisy motorcycle went by, popping its engine. Frightened by the loud noise, the squirrel nipped the end of Rusty's finger with his sharp teeth as he grabbed the nut, then fled across the yard and up the tree.





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“Ouch!” Rusty screamed and ran inside the house, crying and holding his finger.

“What happened?” Mom asked. “Are you OK?”

Suddenly, Rusty remembered Dad’s warning about having to go to the doctor to get shots if a squirrel bit him. He also remembered that Dad had said to leave the squirrels alone. “I . . . I . . . I . . . jabbed myself with a sharp stick,” Rusty sobbed.

Mom held his finger and studied the wound carefully. “The skin is broken and it’s bleeding just a little. I’ll wash it off, put on some anti-bacterial cream and a Band-Aid, and you’ll be fine.”

Rusty’s finger throbbed with pain throughout the afternoon, but he didn’t tell his mother. When his father came home from work, he wasn’t feeling any better. “Hey, what about going out and feeding the squirrels while Mom finishes supper?”

Rusty hung his head, “Naw, I don’t feel like it today.”

“He hasn’t been feeling well since he cut his finger on a stick this morning,” Mom called from the kitchen.

Dad glanced at his son and then at Rusty’s bandaged finger. “Let me take a look.”

“Oh, it’s not too bad,” Rusty mumbled. Deep down inside, Rusty began to feel very uncomfortable.

Dad ignored Rusty’s protests and proceeded to remove the Band-Aid. He studied the injury for several seconds. The tip of Rusty’s finger was fiery red and swollen. “Are you sure you injured your finger with a stick?”

Rusty’s face paled. “Um, um, uh, yeah.”

Dad looked straight into his son’s eyes and asked, “Rusty, this is important. Tell me the truth. Were you feeding the squirrels and one of



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them bit you? If so, I need to know now!”

Rusty glanced down at the floor and then nervously toward the kitchen, not wanting his mother to hear. “Yeah, but I asked Mom’s permission first,” he countered.

Dad’s voice sounded serious. “Didn’t I tell you to leave the squirrels alone? Didn’t I say they could bite you and possibly give you some awful disease?”

Rusty’s lower lip quivered. “B-b-but Dad, my plan was working. If that noisy motorcycle hadn’t gone by and scared the squirrel, he would have eaten out of my hand instead of biting me.”

Dad looked at his son sternly. Rusty knew he was in for a serious talking-to. “Son, even a perfect plan wouldn’t have made this right. First, you disobeyed me. Second, you took advantage of your mother. She didn’t know that I told you not to feed the squirrels without me. And third, you lied to Mom and me. Those lies could have cost you your life. One of the diseases squirrels carry is lockjaw. People can get it if bitten by an infected animal. Unless this disease is treated immediately, it could kill you.”

“I’m so sorry,” sniffed Rusty. “Am I going to die?”

“No, you’re not going to die because Mom and I are going to take you right now to the hospital for a shot. Supper will have to wait.”

During the ride to the hospital, tears slid down Rusty’s cheeks as he stared at his swollen finger. He didn’t want to die, but he certainly wasn’t looking forward to getting a shot.

At the hospital parking lot, Dad found a place to park the car while Mom put her arm around Rusty and led him into the crowded emergency room. He found a seat while Mom explained to a nurse what had happened. After what seemed like forever, the nurse led Rusty into a curtained cubical. “Hop up onto the table,” she said. “The doctor will be here in a few minutes.”

After the doctor examined him, a nurse came in with what looked to Rusty like the largest needle in the world. Rusty squeezed his eyes shut and braced for the pain he knew would come. “Ouch, that hurts!” he

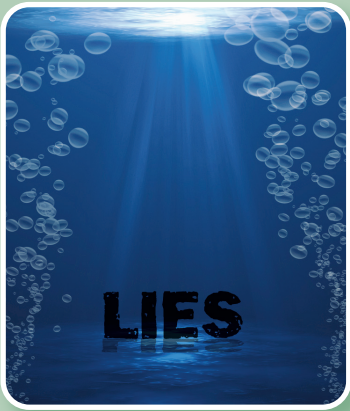
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cried. Oh, how he wished he hadn't disobeyed his dad.

On the way home from the hospital, Dad stopped at a local taco place for a quick supper. Rusty nibbled on his bean burrito. He didn't feel much like eating. He looked across the booth at his parents. "Mom, Dad, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."

"Of course we forgive you," Mom replied.

"And will Jesus forgive me too?"



"Yes, He will," Dad said. "Jesus promises that when we ask for forgiveness He is faithful and just to forgive our sins."

"Even the really bad ones?"

"Of course," Mom said. "And do you know what He does next?"

Rusty shook his head.

"Jesus dumps them in the deepest spot in the ocean, and they are never, ever to be seen again!"

"I want Jesus to do that for me. Can we pray right here?"

Rusty reached across the booth and took hold of his parents' hands and bowed his head, "Dear Jesus, please forgive me for disobeying my dad and for lying to my parents. Thank You, Jesus, for forgiving me. Please take those nasty old lies and dump them in the ocean right now. Amen!"

In a few weeks, Rusty's finger was completely healed; but every time he looked at the scar, he thanked Jesus for throwing his sins in the deepest part of the sea. ■

*If we confess our sins, he . . . will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

— 1 John 1:9, NIV



# Fat Cat Freddie

**R**oy and Lisa thought Freddie was the best cat in the whole world! After all, he was a *prayed-for* cat. They had prayed and prayed that someday they would have a cat of their own and they just knew God gave them Freddie!

They loved to play all the regular cat games with him. He chased a piece of thin rope they pulled through the house, and jumped and batted at a little cloth ball filled with catnip that they dangled from a string. They even dressed Freddie up in baby clothes—which was a fun game for the kids—but not so much fun for Freddie. The funniest thing of all, however, was watching Freddie chase the wind-up mouse and pounce on it.

In spite of all the exercise Freddie got at chasing things, he grew to be a fat cat—a very fat cat! He loved to sit in the big window where the sun would come streaming through. He would sleep there, stretch, give himself a bath, or just sit and look outside. Although



Cat photos by Kim Otis



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he was an inside cat, the family had to really watch Freddie because he loved to escape to the outside whenever the door was opened.

One winter it snowed and snowed and snowed. There was so much snow that when the wind blew, it made giant snowdrifts that nearly covered the swing set. In fact, it snowed so much that the schools closed for a whole week, leaving the kids with plenty of time to play inside with Freddie and to play outside in the snow.



On one of the snow days, Lisa and Roy couldn't stand being inside another minute, so they put on their heavy snowsuits and went outside to build a snow fort. In some places, the snow was taller than them. All they had to do to make walls was shovel out the snow that was on the inside of the fort. They were just in the process of making a pile of snowballs in case they had to defend their fort, when Mom decided to brave the cold and get the mail.

Freddie watched Mom intently from his perch on the windowsill as she was getting on her heavy jacket, snow boots, and gloves. When she opened the front door, she was momentarily blinded by the intense glare of the sun shining on the bright snow. Freddie took advantage of the situation and ran out the door without anyone seeing him.

As Mom stomped through the deep snow to the end of the driveway, she had no idea Freddie was following her. She opened the mailbox, and just at that very moment, the big county snowplow went down their street. Snow went flying high up into the air.

The big truck made a terrible sound as it scraped the snow from the pavement. Freddie was so frightened he jumped into the wooden box for packages that was under the mailbox. At the same time, lots of the snow that flew up in the air came down and covered the box with a great



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big *swoosh*. There was so much snow that it almost covered the entire mailbox! After looking around and enjoying the glistening beauty of the sunshine, Mom went back inside. She had no idea that poor Freddie was trapped by the snow covering the wooden box.

Lisa and Roy had so much fun playing outside that it wasn't until after supper that Lisa went looking for Freddie. She looked in all the usual places: on top of the dresser, inside the clothes basket, under the bed, and behind the sofa. Where was Freddie?

Soon Roy joined the search. Roy even went to the door to call Freddie, in case he had escaped, as he sometimes did. But Freddie wasn't on the doorstep waiting to come in—as he usually was.

“Mom, have you seen Freddie?” Lisa asked.

“Not since early this morning, before you went out to build a fort. The last time I remember seeing Freddie, he was sitting on the windowsill.”

They asked Dad, but he hadn't seen Freddie either.

Lisa started crying because she couldn't find Freddie and nobody remembered seeing him since early morning. *How could he just disappear? Something terrible must have happened to him. He must have escaped when the door was open.*

When it was time to go to bed, Mom, Dad, Lisa, and Roy had worship. They all prayed that Freddie would be safe

and come home to them really soon. It was at bedtime that Freddie was missed the most because he usually slept at the foot of either Lisa's or Roy's bed. Now, there was no Freddie to keep them company.

After a couple of days, Lisa and Roy had to start school again; but every morning and every evening they prayed that Freddie would find his way home.



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One week went by and then another. Pretty soon sixteen days went by. The sun had been shining that day and the snow had started melting, but Freddie still had not come home. Lisa and Roy were very sad because they missed Freddie so much. They had almost given up hope of ever seeing their beloved cat again.

On the seventeenth day after Freddie had disappeared, Mom went out to the mailbox to get the mail. As she closed the lid, the snow that had built up around the mailbox fell away from the box under it—and out stepped Freddie! He had been in that box under the mailbox all that time! Mom was so happy to see Freddie! She picked him up, hugged and kissed him, and carried him all the way to the house. She could hardly wait to see the faces of Dad, Lisa, and Roy when they got home and saw Freddie.

Mom put some food down for him, and he was so hungry he immediately started to eat. It had been seventeen whole days since he had eaten anything! Mom was so excited she wanted to call the kids at school, but she decided to wait and tell them when they came home.

Around four o'clock that afternoon, Lisa and Roy came through the door, telling Mom all about what happened in school. They put their stuff away and went into the kitchen to talk to Mom some more. As they passed through the living room, they both saw Freddie

at the same time. They stopped short and gasped, then started laughing and shouting, “Freddie, Freddie, you’re home!” as they rushed over to hug him. Freddie was just as happy to see Lisa and Roy. He reached up and licked each of their noses, rubbed his head against them, and purred.

When Dad came home that night, Lisa and Roy met him at the door holding Freddie. Dad was amazed. Immediately, the family began to piece



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together the story of what had happened to their missing cat seventeen days before. Then, during family worship that night, they all thanked God for keeping Freddie safe and bringing him home.

It wasn't long before Freddie was sitting back in his favorite spot on the windowsill and enjoying the sun. But two things had changed: he wasn't quite as eager to escape as he once was, and he was no longer a fat cat! ■

*Call to Me, and I will answer you,  
and show you great and mighty things,  
which you do not know.*  
—Jeremiah 33:3, NKJV