The Three Questions, written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth:

There once was a boy named Nikolai who sometimes felt uncertain about the right way to act. “I want to be a good person,” he told his friends. “But I don’t always know the best way to do that.”

Nikolai’s friends understood and wanted to help him.

“If only I could find the answers to three questions,” Nikolai continued, “then I would always know what to do.” When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? And what is the right thing to do?

Nikolai’s friends considered the three questions. Then Sonya, the heron, spoke: “To know the best time to do things, one must plan in advance,” she said. Gogol, the monkey, who had been rooting through some leaves to find something good to eat, said, “You will know when to do things if you watch and pay close attention.” Then Pushkin, the dog, who was just dozing off, rolled over and said, “You can’t pay attention to everything yourself. You need a pack to keep watch and help you decide when to do things.

For example, Gogol, a coconut is about to fall on your head!”

Nikolai thought for a moment. Then he asked his second question: “who is the most important one?”

“Those who are closest to heaven,” said Sonya, circling up into the sky. “Those who know how to help the sick,” said Gogol, stroking his bruised noggin. “Those who make the rules,” growled Pushkin.

Nikolai thought some more. Then he asked the third question: “What is the right thing to do?”


Then Nikolai thought for a long while. He loved his friends. He knew they were all trying their best to help him answer his questions. But their answers did not seem quite right.

Then, an idea came to him. I know, he thought. I will ask Leo, the turtle. He has lived a very long time. Surely he will know the answers I am looking for.
So Nikolai hiked high up into the mountains where the old turtle lived alone. When Nikolai arrived, he found Leo digging in the garden. The turtle was old, and digging was hard for him.

“I have three questions and I came to ask your help,” Nikolai said. “When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?”

Leo listened carefully, but he only smiled. Then he went on with his digging. “You must be tired,” Nikolai said at last. “Let me help you.” The old turtle gave him his shovel and thanked him. And because it was easier for a young boy to dig than it was for an old turtle, Nikolai kept digging until the rows were finished.

But just as he finished, the wind blew wildly and ran burst from darkened clouds. As they moved toward the cottage for shelter, Nikolai suddenly heard a cry for help. Running down the path, he found a panda whose leg had been injured by a fallen tree. Carefully, Nikolai carried her into Leo’s house and made a splint for her leg with a stick of bamboo.

The storm raged on, banging at the doors and windows. Leo smiled when he saw what Nikolai had done.

The next morning the sun was warm, the birds sang, and all was well with the world. The panda’s leg was healing nicely, and she thanked Nikolai for saving her.

At that moment, Sonya, Gogol, and Pushkin arrived to make sure everyone was all right. Nikolai felt great peace within himself. He had wonderful friends. And he had saved the panda. But he also felt disappointed. He still had not found the answers to his three questions. So he asked Leo one more time.

The old turtle looked at the boy. “But your questions have been answered!” he said. “They have?” asked the boy.

“Yesterday, if you had not stayed to help me dig my garden, you wouldn’t have heard the panda’s cries for help in the storm. Therefore, the most important time was the time you spent digging in the garden.”
The most important one at the moment was me, and the most important thing to do was to help me with my garden.

“Later, when you found the injured panda, the most important time was the time you spent mending her leg. The most important one was the panda. And the most important thing to do was to take care of her and make her safe.

“Remember then, that there is only one important time, and that time is now. The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one whom standing at your side.”

For these, my dear boy, are the answers to what is most important in this world.

--So that’s the story, and here is the message:

When we truly believe that Jesus is the Savior, that he is the light, that he is our glory – and when we are absolutely convinced that Jesus loves us – no matter what – then we live our lives differently. . .

We don’t live our lives unable to let loose of the past – or to live in fear of the future – we are content to know that God is right here – right now --- in the present moment --- with us and loving us.

We know as Christians that we are not the center of the universe – that God places people right in front of us – who need our love, understanding, and compassion.

And we know the most important thing to do is not to ignore, criticize, or belittle those in front of us – but to accept them and do good for them and to challenge them to be the best person they can be.

Yes, when we are absolutely convinced that Jesus loves us – no matter what – then we live our lives differently. We try to live as God wants us to.