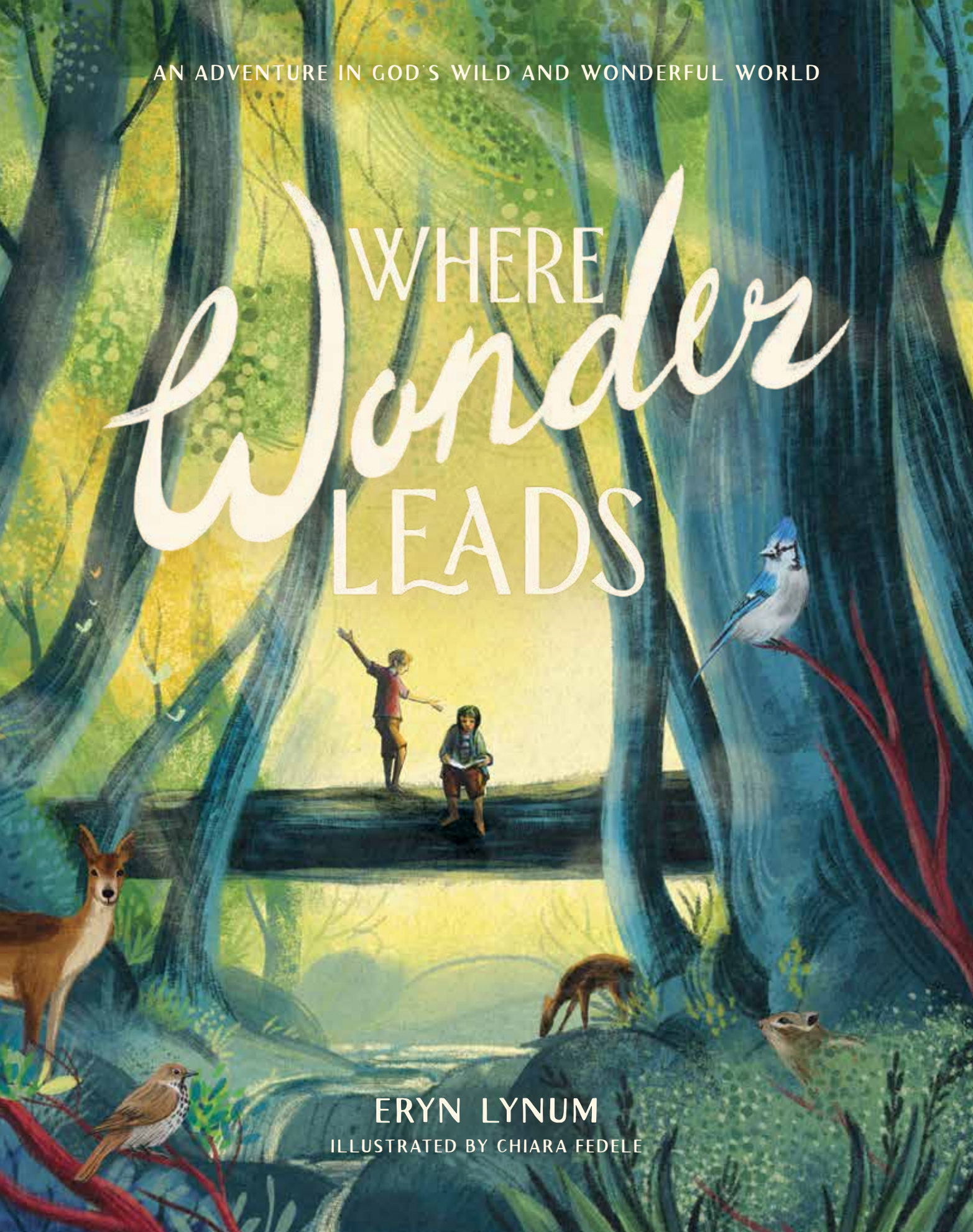


AN ADVENTURE IN GOD'S WILD AND WONDERFUL WORLD

WHERE Wonders LEADS



ERYN LYNUM

ILLUSTRATED BY CHIARA FEDELE

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For Zeke, Ellis, Will, and Roary

*Thank you for inspiring me to follow
where wonder leads.*

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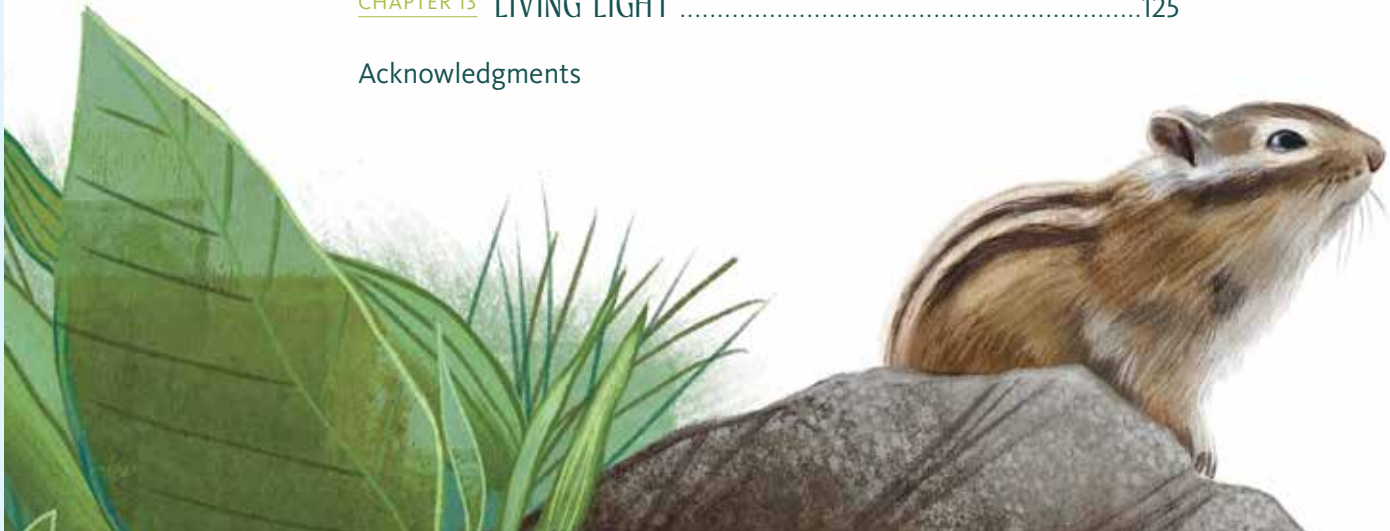
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Acknowledgments



INTRODUCTION

Exploring God’s wild and wonderful world has deeply impacted my faith. It has also led to writing this book. As I explore outside, I see God’s fingerprints in every beetle, bird, and tree. Theology, or the study of God and the Bible, has been my passion since I was a child. In elementary through middle school, I gathered friends and neighbors in my family’s home and hosted Bible programs and camps. A desire to rightly handle Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15) followed me into adulthood, growing right alongside my appreciation for nature. In creation, I have found an endless, wonderful supply of materials that can be used to teach about God and nurture faith.

Romans 1:20 tells us, “There are things about him that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made.” As you journey through this story, my prayer is that you, too, will discover the joy and wonder of Scripture and creation. I hope every time you step outside, you’ll glimpse through creation the “things about him that people cannot see.” And I hope each time you venture into God’s Word, you’ll see how God and Jesus used nature in their teaching and work. I pray you’ll experience deep peace and profound joy as you follow God where wonder leads.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



Each chapter includes a continuing story, a key verse, and an opportunity to dig deeper into faith and scientific applications. Throughout the story, scientific terms are introduced to grow one’s understanding of God’s intricate designs.

To assist in learning and remembering new words, most chapters include pronunciation guides and a glossary of terms. To inspire outdoor exploration, many chapters include an outdoor adventure suggestion for young, budding naturalists.

A nature journal is referenced regularly and is recommended for each reader. This can be a simple spiral notebook, though some blank space is also great for sketching.

Journey at your preferred pace, and enjoy exploring God’s wild and wonderful world!



CHAPTER 1

TREASURE IN THE FOREST

"Stop and consider the wondrous works of God."

JOB 37:14 ESV

Willow!" a boy shouted, his voice echoing through the forest. A slightly taller girl raced past him.

"Willow, please slow down!" he pleaded. His legs ached as he gasped for breath.

Finally, Willow slowed to a stop. Her nine-year-old cousin, Casper, thought to himself, *It's about time.*

Willow tucked a loose strand of hair back into her braid. *Oh, no. Was her hair becoming frizzy?* Sometimes it did that on hot and humid days. Her hair became like fern plants uncurling and stretching toward the sun, their leaves bursting upward like fireworks. But how could she feel upset when she loved ferns? She reached down and touched one.

Casper also loved ferns—especially seeing how different they were in California compared to the ones back home in Colorado.

Pressing her knees into the dirt, Willow parted the ferns like the curtains in a window. What did she see?

Even though she was a year older and two inches taller than Casper, Willow looked small beside the towering redwood trees. Some were three hundred feet tall—around the same height as the Statue of Liberty.

"Willow," Casper interrupted. "We better head back. We have to go to the airport tonight."

"Okay," said Willow, peering between the ferns. "But first, come and see what I found!"

Casper rolled his eyes, but he was curious about what Willow had spotted. She beamed, "Look at this treasure!"

"What is it?" asked Casper, walking closer. "A pirate's treasure?"

“No,” Willow giggled. “Who ever heard of pirates in the forest?”

Casper leaned in. “Then what is it?” he asked.

Slowly and carefully, Willow lifted a small stick from inside the ferns. Atop it was a bright yellow blob. Her smile grew as she exclaimed, “Forest treasure!”

“What is that?!” Casper gasped, disgusted and surprised. “It’s slimy! That’s not treasure!”

Willow watched the creature slowly slide across the stick. “It’s a banana slug,” she began, “and it is golden!” She was right about that. Casper didn’t know slugs could be bright yellow. “And,” she continued, “it’s extraordinary.”

Willow held out the stick to Casper. He scrunched his nose, unsure how close he wanted to get to the creature. Hesitantly, but curiously, he reached for the stick and asked, “Why is it so slimy?” He trusted that Willow already had the answer.

“The slime helps the slug move across the forest floor,” Willow explained. “It can glide over hard things like rocks and sharp things like sticks without getting hurt. The slime also helps it absorb water.”

“Like a sponge?” asked Casper.

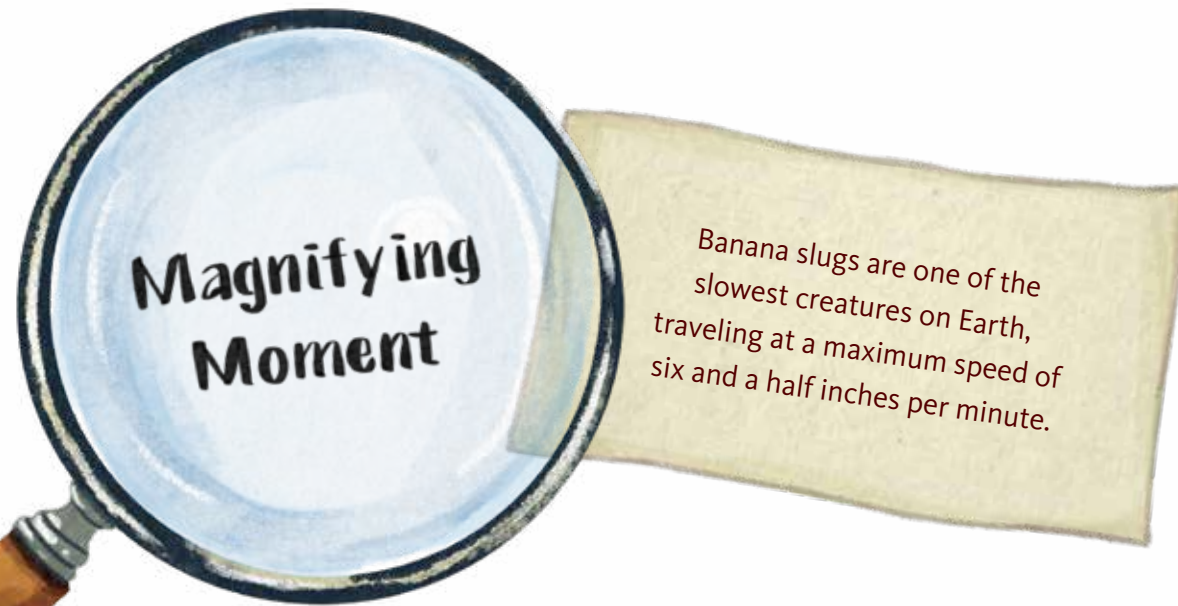
“Exactly!” said Willow. “The slime helps the slug soak up more water, which it needs. It is actually made mostly of water. The slime can even help slugs find more slugs.”

Casper raised an eyebrow. “Are you serious? Like, they can send slime messages?”

Willow giggled. “No. When the slugs travel, they leave a trail of slime behind. Other slugs can smell that slime and know which way the first slug went.”

“Oh,” Casper said. “Like when my baby brother crawls from one room to another with a dirty diaper. I can smell exactly where he went.”





Banana slugs are one of the slowest creatures on Earth, traveling at a maximum speed of six and a half inches per minute.

“Something like that.” Willow smiled. “Even slime has a purpose in God’s creation!”

“Willow!” called a loud voice in the distance. And then more loudly, “Casper! Willow!”

“We’re here!” Casper replied. He nudged Willow. “Come on.” Then he gently lowered the stick with the slug back into the ferns. “How do you know so much about slugs, anyways?” Casper asked as they walked toward the voices of their parents. “Did you learn it in a science book?”

“No,” said Willow. “The best place to learn about wonderful creatures isn’t in a book. I mean, books help. And I have many nature and science books in my tree house. But the best way to learn about nature is to follow where wonder leads.”

“Huh?” Casper asked. “What do you mean by *wonder*?”

Willow smiled as she looked up at the massive redwoods. “You know how exciting it is to grow bigger and older?”

Casper nodded and replied, “Yeah, I’m excited to learn how to drive a car, and to eat ice cream whenever I want.”

Willow giggled. “Exactly. But wonder does the opposite. It helps us feel small.”

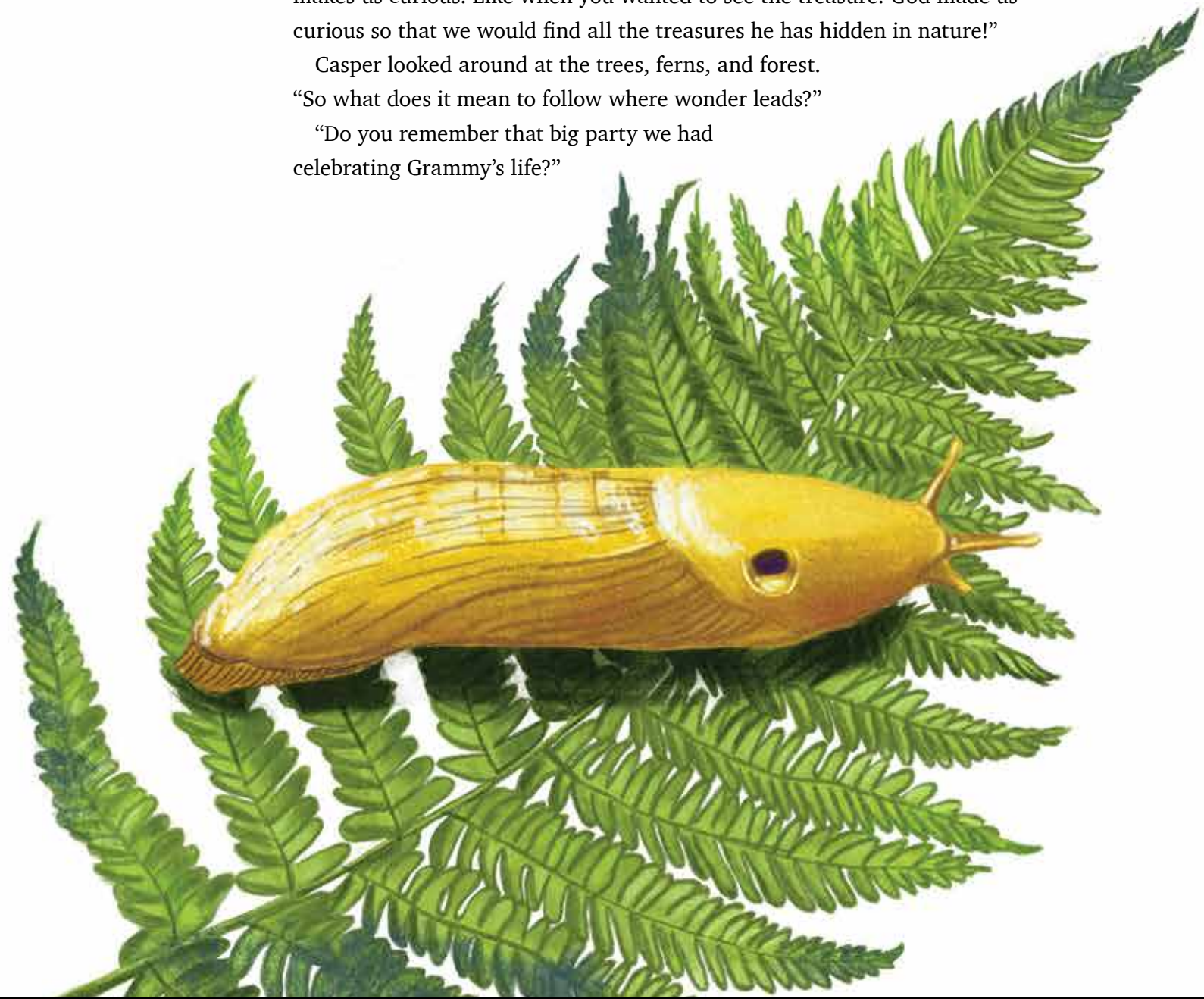
Casper looked confused as he glanced up at the massive redwoods. “Why would I want to feel small? I want to be bigger.”

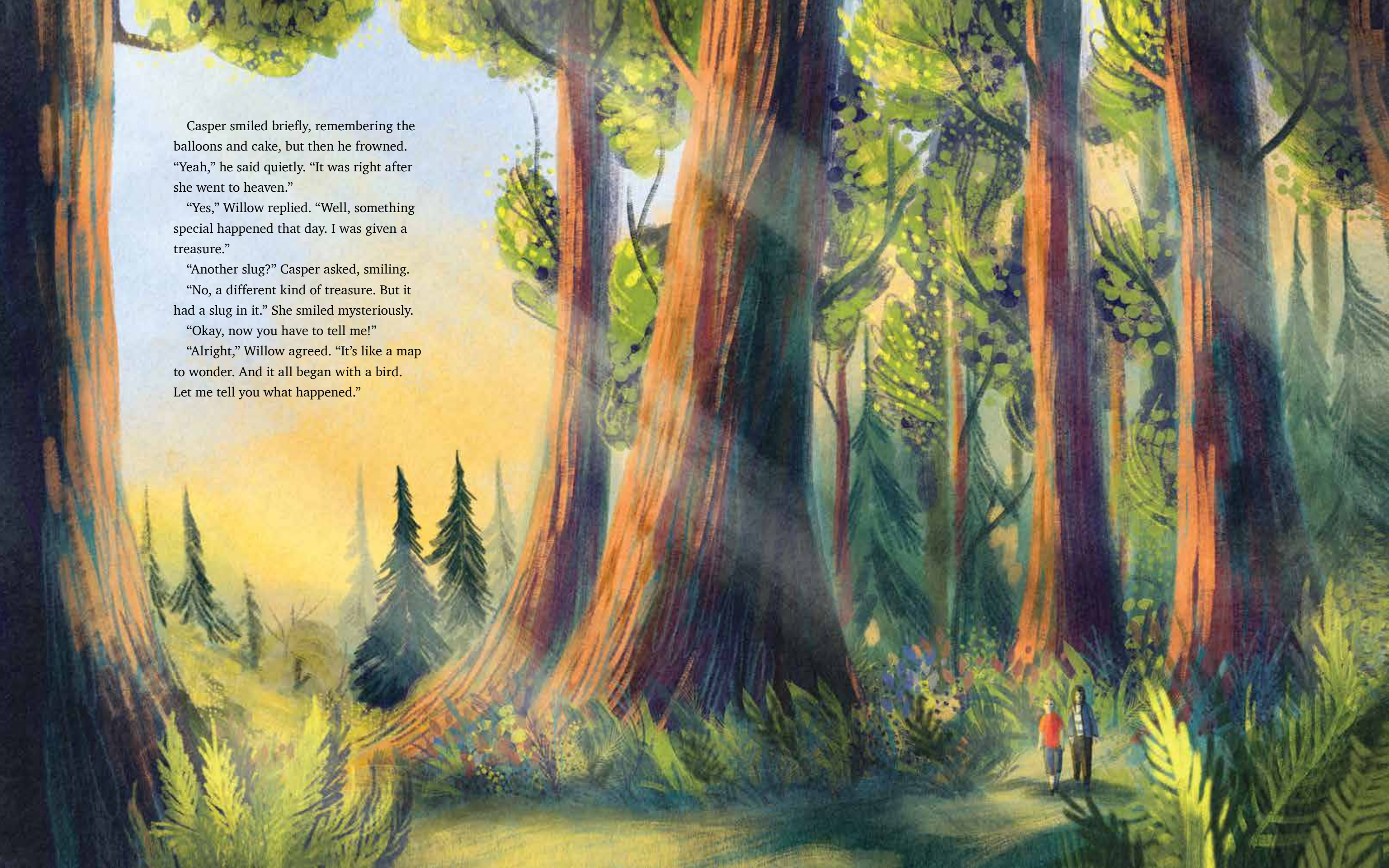
“Wonder is different,” said Willow. “It makes you feel small in the best way because it reminds you of how big God is. He is so big, but he cares for the tiniest birds and banana slugs! Wonder reminds us of God’s greatness and makes us curious. Like when you wanted to see the treasure. God made us curious so that we would find all the treasures he has hidden in nature!”

Casper looked around at the trees, ferns, and forest.

“So what does it mean to follow where wonder leads?”

“Do you remember that big party we had celebrating Grammy’s life?”





Casper smiled briefly, remembering the balloons and cake, but then he frowned. "Yeah," he said quietly. "It was right after she went to heaven."

"Yes," Willow replied. "Well, something special happened that day. I was given a treasure."

"Another slug?" Casper asked, smiling.

"No, a different kind of treasure. But it had a slug in it." She smiled mysteriously.

"Okay, now you have to tell me!"

"Alright," Willow agreed. "It's like a map to wonder. And it all began with a bird. Let me tell you what happened."



DIG DEEPER

“Stop and consider the wondrous works of God.”

JOB 37:14 ESV

How did Willow respond when she found the banana slug in the fern? Did she keep walking? No, she stopped to look more closely. This verse in Job invites us to do the same, to stop and see what God has made. The word *wondrous* sounds similar to the word *wonderful*. Did you know that it actually means “wonderful” too? Job is encouraging us to stop and see the wonderful works of God.

This Bible verse was first written in another language called Hebrew. The Hebrew word for wondrous is *pālā’*. It sounds like “pah-law.” Can you say that? *Pālā’* means “wonderful,” but it can also reflect an act of God or a miracle. It’s the perfect word to describe God’s creation.

The more you learn about God’s wild and wonderful world, the more you will notice his marvelous works. On your next nature walk, practice stopping whenever something grabs your attention. Enjoy all that God has made!



TIME TO EXPLORE

In your nature journal, explore the following questions through writing, drawing, or painting:

- How did Willow describe “wonder”? How might you describe it? Share something from nature that fills you with wonder.
- Have you ever found treasure in the forest or elsewhere in nature? What kind of treasure? Cool rocks, fossils, creatures, etc.?
- What would you love to find in nature? Like Willow, consider going on a treasure hunt this week. *(Remember: Some treasures are not meant to be taken home, and living creatures should be left in their habitat. Check the rules in your area to see if you can collect things or if you should leave them where you find them. If that’s the case, collect them through taking notes or drawing pictures.)*