

The Talking Hill



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Ethan loved exploring the woods behind his grandparents' cabin. There was a hiking trail that led to a rocky hill overlooking a beautiful lake. But Ethan's favorite part wasn't the view—it was the echo.

Whenever he climbed to the top, he would cup his hands around his mouth and shout.
"HELLO!"

A second later, the hills answered: "HELLO!"

He laughed every single time.

One sunny afternoon, Ethan invited his younger cousin Lily to come with him. "I want to show you something amazing," he said.

When they reached the top of the hill, Ethan smiled. "Watch this!". He shouted, "GOOD MORNING!"

The hills answered, "GOOD MORNING!"

Lily's eyes grew wide. "It talks!"

Ethan laughed.

"No, it just repeats whatever you say."

Lily wanted to try. She took a deep breath and yelled,

"YOU'RE AWESOME!"

The echo came back, "YOU'RE AWESOME!"

Both children burst into laughter. Then Ethan had another idea.

"What if I shout something mean?"

Lily shrugged. "I don't know."

Ethan called out, "YOU'RE STUPID!"

A moment later, the hills shouted back, "YOU'RE STUPID!"

The words sounded much louder the second time.

Lily frowned. "I don't like hearing that."

"Me neither," Ethan admitted.

They stood quietly for a moment.

As they started walking back toward the cabin, they heard their grandfather calling them for dinner.

Inside the house, everyone gathered around the table. Grandma served delicious homemade soup. Everything was peaceful—until Ethan accidentally bumped Lily's glass of juice. The juice spilled all over her shirt. Lily jumped back. "My favorite shirt!"

Ethan quickly grabbed a towel. "I'm sorry!"

But Lily was already upset. "You always ruin everything!"

Ethan felt his face become hot. "I do not!"

"Yes, you do!"

"You always blame me!"

For a few seconds, the dinner table became very quiet. Then Grandpa smiled gently. "Ethan... Lily... come with me for a minute." He led them outside onto the porch. "Do you remember the echo?"

Both children nodded.

"What happened when you shouted kind words?"

"They came back," Ethan answered.

"And what happened when you shouted mean words?"

"They came back too," Lily said softly.

Grandpa nodded. "Families can become little echoes." The children looked at each other. "If someone speaks with anger," Grandpa continued, "anger often comes back. If someone answers with kindness, kindness often comes back too."

Ethan looked down at his shoes. "I guess I shouted back."

"So did I," Lily whispered.

Grandpa smiled. "The wonderful thing about an echo is this: someone can choose to change what gets repeated."

Lily looked up. "How?"

"You don't have to repeat the angry words you hear."

Ethan thought for a moment. Instead of looking at Lily, he looked at Grandpa. "So... I could answer differently?"

"Exactly."

The three of them walked back inside. Ethan took a deep breath. "Lily... I'm really sorry I spilled your juice. It was an accident."

Lily was quiet for a second. Then she smiled. "I know. I'm sorry for saying you ruin everything. I forgive you."

"I forgive you too."

Grandma brought another glass of juice. Dad smiled. Mom smiled. Even Grandpa winked. Dinner suddenly felt warm again.

Later that evening, Ethan and Lily returned to the hill one last time before going home. The sun was setting behind the lake. This time they shouted together, "GOD IS GOOD!"

The hills answered, "GOD IS GOOD!"

Then Lily smiled. "I think conversations are really like echoes."

Ethan nodded. "They don't always change right away."

"No."

"But somebody has to choose the first kind words."

As they walked home, Ethan remembered something Grandpa had said. "You don't have to repeat the angry words you hear."

That sounded a lot like something Jesus would say. And Ethan decided that the next time someone spoke with anger, he wanted his words to sound different. After all, every echo has to begin with one voice.

This story was adapted from Rev. Lucas Bruder's sermon "Pillow Fight" with the assistance of AI tools.