

Trail Mix

Nourishment for the Journey

A Devotional Book written by students, faculty, and staff
from Southern Wesleyan University

Sponsored and Presented by the 2016-2017 SWU Student
Government Association

Forward

Dear New Student:

God placed an idea on my heart a couple years ago that is finally being realized in this new devotional designed specifically for you, our newest SWU Warrior. The vision of current students, faculty and staff writing words of faith and encouragement to incoming students is so very missional to this institution.

This community you have joined was established on this South Carolina hill in 1906 with the mission of impacting the world for Christ, starting with our own students! The contributors of this devotional book are of one mind: To share from their heart the topics that have made a difference in their lives in the hope of paying their experiences, hopes and dreams forward to you.

I hope you will find this simple but profound gift a blessing in your devotional life and that you will read these thoughts more than once as you prepare to be a change agent in this world.

Sincere thanks goes to our writers and especially Southern Wesleyan's 2016-2107 Student Government Association, who saw this project to completion.

May your time at SWU be filled with joy and success and your faith deepened and expanded through the writings found in this devotional book.

Welcome to SWU!

With enthusiasm,

Dr. Todd S. Voss
President

Preface

SWU Student,

During the 2016-2017 school year Dr. Voss brought the idea of a student devotional to the attention of the Student Government Association. Hearing his vision for a devotional geared specifically towards incoming SWU students caught our attention and we decided to jump on it!

The vision for this project is to give you, a student new to SWU, the opportunity to hear from those who have gone before you...those who have done this 'college thing'. This devotional is written by students and professors for students. Each devotional has been written to encourage you, guide you, and help open your eyes to everything that God has for you.

The community of SWU is unlike anything that I have ever seen. I also do not believe that you are here by accident. God has a beautiful plan for your life, and SWU is just the start. As you jump into this community here are some tips to growing in your faith at SWU:

1. Take opportunities to be prayed for or to pray for someone else
2. Ask people about their life stories! Be willing to share about your story too!
3. Participate in a Discipleship Group
4. Take a trip to Potter's Place (spend some time in a prayer cabin or walking the trails)
5. Ask questions, and don't stop until you get an answer!

I pray that God will speak to you through these devotions and that you would be encouraged by the wisdom of those around you.

In Christ-like Love,

Michaela L. Wickham
SWU Student Chaplain

Faith-filled Community

Dr. Todd S. Voss
President, SWU

Scripture Reference:

Hebrews 11:1

The SWU Vision, Element 1:

Faith is a wonderful virtue, but as we worked to build the concept in our renewed SWU vision statement, we felt something more descriptive than the character trait of faith was still needed. Carefully observing the distinct community that has formed in our Adult and Graduate Studies Cohort model, and living in community with what I would consider the most welcoming and gracious students on the planet, we began to dive into Scripture for a deeper perspective.

Hebrews 11:1 states: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (NIV).

That’s it! A faith-filled community is one that is confident in the “hope” that you, our students, will grow spiritually stronger in THIS community than anywhere else. Our SWU faith-filled community is:

- Authentic and countercultural
- Built on love
- A community that represents faith overflowing, splashing against the walls of self-centeredness, indolence, disrespect and oppression and washes them clean
- A place where confidence digs deep and holds firm

But faith is also assurance. Not in ourselves, not in a “system”, not in a program or curriculum, but in Him. It means that while being imperfect people, carrying out this opaque vision of being a faith-filled community, we are assured God will build it, and He will bless it, as described in Ephesians 3:20, “... exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”.

Prayer:

To have faith that overflows, Lord, that is what I ask of you today. Fill me with confidence in the spiritual growth I hope for and will experience in this community, and give me the assurance in what I feel, but often cannot see.

Inventive Learning

Dr. Todd S. Voss
President, SWU

Scripture Reference:

Colossians 1:16-17

The SWU Vision, Element 2:

SWU just may have coined a new concept with this vision element! While the constructs of creativity and innovation have been researched ad infinitum, what makes “inventive learning” different? While the term unmistakably integrates the God-given concept of creativity, just as much as inventive learning is about character, it is also decidedly about action. Inventive learning ties all the elements of education together.

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

As we enjoy a new way of doing higher education at SWU, we recognize the critical nature of experience in the learning process. We believe you, our students, must be at the center of learning and you learn better when you get your hands dirty. We believe you need to be stretched in small steps at a time, and assessment needs to be conducted FOR learning, not OF learning. But more than that, we recognize the Author of learning: the most Creative Inventor of all time. He holds all things together, and that is why we must incorporate “hands on” experiential learning in every major, every program and every degree. We are designing everything from specialized research houses to active real-life skill development laboratories where practice solidifies theory and conceptualization. It is the most salient way to make learning memorable, relevant and exciting for you, the next generation of student who will change the world!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, May you bless my time in this place, filling it with creativity and purpose. Higher learning means nothing without You. Nudge me to take advantage of each and every opportunity to learn by doing. Expand my mind while I use my hands. And in that practice, allow me to bring honor to You in all ways and at all times.

Contagious Generosity

Dr. Todd S. Voss
President, SWU

Scripture Reference:

Ephesians 4:28

SWU Vision Element 3:

I was asked an innocent question by a wealthy business owner some time ago about why SWU chose “contagious generosity” as a vision element. Not being a believer, he felt profit or enrollment growth would be a better vision goal. That query forced me to think beyond the routine of my typical response to consider more deeply the heart of the question.

John Piper, founder of Desiring God.org suggests in his book of the same title that there are three ways to look at acquiring and using the things of this world. The first is to simply steal what we can. The second is to work hard to acquire all we can, and the third is to work hard to acquire so that we can give all we can.

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Ephesians 4:28).

Unfortunately, too many people, including believers, live on the second level. Acquisition of things becomes in many ways, the meaning of life. But God provides for us, so that we can have enough to live on, with the remainder designed to support the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of others. The same principle for us is also true for SWU: He provides enough for you, our students, to live on and grow, with the rest to share with others. As SWU grows in influence and prosperity, our interest in establishing a posture of contagious generosity will keep us grounded on this principle and model it for a new generation of graduates like you to live a prosperous and generous life. Piper puts it this way: “God has made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn’t. Copper will do. Copper can carry unbelievable riches to others.”

Prayer:

Dear Lord, in a world of need and desperation, use me to be a conduit of generosity for those who need support. Help me to recognize that this is your design, and You will care for me, allowing for my abundance to be shared as a blessing for others.

Transformation and Renewing of the Mind

Caleb W. Southern
History

Scripture Reference:

Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16

In Romans 12:2 Paul writes, “[L]et God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” This is one of the key verses in understanding the role of the mind in the life of the Christian. True transformation and salvation is first an act of the mind. Paul tells us that God will make us into a new creation not by changing the way we feel or the way we act or the way we behave. God begins His work within us by changing the way we think. In order to truly grasp, accept, and understand salvation for our lives we must change the way we think about others, about life, and about God. God is the prime mover in this change, but we are also called to active self-reflection and work to change the way we think about things. An implication of this process is laid out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:16, “For ‘Who can know the Lord’s thoughts? / Who knows enough to teach him?’ But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.” Upon accepting the transforming power of God in our minds, we are actually given the mind of Christ! R. Kent Hughes writes, “The dizzying potential of the human mind reaches its apex in the possibility of possessing the mind of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.” Take time to ask God how He can have more of your mind. How can the Holy Spirit work to change the way you think? Self-reflection in this area will lead to transformation, new life, and a better understanding of God’s thoughts for and about you!

Prayer:

God, examine my mind. Show me how I can more fully love you in the way that I think. Help me to love you and others more fully with my thoughts. Show me the power that the mind has over all my daily actions. Remind me that the mind is what perseveres in faith during times of trouble. In everything, I rejoice and give you thanks for your transforming work in my mind and life. All praise and glory belong to you, God the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Beauty From Brokenness

Caleb W. Southern
History

Scripture Reference:

Psalm 51:8, 17; Psalm 34:18; Romans 8:28

The crushing defeat of life is inescapable. The Bible is filled with stories of individuals who encountered God in incredible ways because of the weight of their earthly circumstances. No one likes brokenness. There is pain and hurt and sorrow in times of intense brokenness. The Psalmist writes, “Oh give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice” (Psalm 51:8). There is pain in this verse and a longing for a return to joy. Later, the Psalmist seems to suggest that this place of intense brokenness is where God desires to do His greatest work. “The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God” (Psalm 51:17). Total brokenness is the place where God can do His greatest work in His followers. Brokenness requires a total emptying of yourself and a total filling of God’s power and strength. True dependence on God is found in brokenness. God promises to be near to those that are hurting and broken. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed” (Psalm 34:18). There is hope here that God will draw close to those who are broken and hurting and He will raise them up into beautiful new life. God illustrates this truth most powerfully in His Son, Jesus. On the cross, Jesus was broken unto death. But God drew close to Him and brought so much beauty from His brokenness. Hold on to hope that God will also bring beauty into your life through your brokenness! He is near to you and will not waste any part of your life. “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28).

Prayer:

God, thank you that you promise to comfort and guide me in the midst of my brokenness. Show me how I can be more fully filled with Your Spirit. Help me to hope that there is beauty on the horizon. Help me to love others and comfort others in the midst of their brokenness just as You love and comfort me. From my broken pieces build a beautiful new creation. Amen.

Attributes of a Holy God

Martin LaBar
Professor of Science, Retired

Scripture Reference:

Isaiah 6:1-3; Revelation 4:6-8

Someone has said that prayer should often include four things, namely adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (ACTS). All too often, we concentrate on supplication and minimize or forget the other phases of prayer.

Of these four, adoration concentrates on what God is, as opposed to thanksgiving, which concentrates on what God does. I love my wife, and try to thank her for what she does, but I also love who and what she is, and I should tell her about these things, too (her smile, her tender hands, her personality, etc.). I should frequently adore her by telling her about those attributes.

We don't understand much about what heaven will be like. But in the Scripture references given, we see one aspect of heaven – adoration, heavenly beings praising God for his holiness, perhaps the most important of God's attributes. We also see it in two of the important prayers of the Bible. In 1 Kings 8:22-53, Solomon prayed a dedication prayer for the temple. Much of that was adoration of what God is. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) begins by adoring God for his holiness. The song writer tells us to "come, let us adore Him." We should. We should tell God about His attributes, and thank Him for them.

Prayer:

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I adore you for who you are. You are holy. You are fully and completely good. You hate sin, but You are love, and You made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and forgotten. You want me to be holy, too, and have made it possible. You are all-wise, and incomparably creative, wise and creative enough to make a glorious universe that works well, from sub-atomic particles to galaxies, from ribosomes to brains. You are matchless! Thank You for who You are.

For a list of the attributes of God see the website below:

<http://sunandshield.blogspot.com/2012/12/attributes-and-qualities-of-god.html>

Confession

Basil Chad Chisholm, PhD
Assistant Professor of English

Scripture References:

1 John 1:9, James 5:16, Proverbs 32:5, Psalm 28:13

If we are honest, the concept of ‘confession’ probably makes us instinctively recoil. The word might bring to mind images of darkened booths, robed men, rosary beads, and debasing chants. For generations of casual seekers who worship Jesus as their ‘homeboy,’ the idea of reconciliation—or even humility before God—must seem more burdensome than the sin they conceal. For the unchurched or unbeliever, the idea of seeking confession might sound weighty, self-abasing, and therefore, completely bunk. However, as the Psalmist implores us, we should acknowledge our sins and not conceal them before God so that we can be forgiven.

Before discussing confession, we should examine the role of sin and its effect on us. In 1872, British writer and future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli described his political opponents as “a range of exhausted volcanoes” where “Not a flame flickers from a single pallid crest.” Disraeli’s phrase ‘exhausted volcanoes’ is an apt description for how sin weighs upon each human soul. While our popular culture depicts sinners as exploding or pulsating volcanoes, our human concupiscence towards sin exhausts us: eventually, sin leads to our extinction.

Yet God provides hope through repentance, and part of repentance involves confession. In his first epistle, the Apostle John says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and He will “forgive us our sins” and “cleans us from all unrighteousness.” James, whom many believe to be the half-brother of Jesus Christ, argued that we must confess our sins to each other and pray together so we might be healed in our spirit and soul. The Proverbs of Solomon also tell us that God will be merciful to those who confess their sins and adds another wrinkle: we are told that if we conceal our sin, we cannot prosper. As Catholic writer Scott Hahn writes, “If we do not confess our sins—if we do not live a life of peace—we will always feel that life is a losing battle.” Finally, acknowledging our sin means more than just owning up to the time we lost our tempers or cheated to give ourselves an advantage. Hahn argues that “penance leads us to a better way. Through our acts of penance, God changes our desires so that we no longer want what we crave, but what we really need to gain eternity, to share in the divine nature” (166). Penance frees us from sin, and penance begins with confession.

Prayer (Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer):

Most merciful God, I confess that I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done, and by what I have left undone. I have not loved you with my whole heart; I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I am truly sorry and I humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on me; that I may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Art of Forgiveness

Basil Chad Chisholm, PhD
Assistant Professor of English

Scripture References:

Matthew 26:28, Mark 11:25, Luke 17:3-4, Acts 3:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17

Jesus spoke often of forgiveness. In the Gospel of Luke, one imagines the growing incredulity of the disciples when Jesus tells them, “If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against you seven times in a day and seven times in a day turn again to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” On the night Judas betrayed him, Jesus instituted The Lord’s Supper to emphasize the role of forgiveness. In an outward sign of inward grace, Jesus passed the cup to his disciples and said, “This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). All of us have been hurt and have caused hurt, so forgiveness cuts both ways. Forgiveness is a process that takes a lifetime to perfect: it might be painful at first, but forgiveness leads to a perfect freedom in Christ.

Unfortunately, most people never know this liberty. As life wears on us, our pride makes it difficult to forgive others and ourselves. We resemble the townspeople in Ray Bradbury’s novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. In the story, an evil carnival led by Mr. Dark comes to Green Town to ensnare the souls of the residents. Many townspeople cannot forgive themselves for growing old or failing to accomplish their past dreams. Worst of all, the townspeople cannot acknowledge the truth of who they are; this makes them easy prey for Mr. Dark and his carnival. The townspeople who escape the carnival are those who refuse to be lured from their neighbors and loved ones by Mr. Dark’s empty promises. These characters defeat the carnival by accepting themselves for what they are, and this reawakens their love for each other.

This is how forgiveness and acceptance work for us. Forgiveness begins with acceptance of our sinful nature: we can no longer project an image of ourselves as self-redeeming. Acceptance of our sinful nature does not mean we become complacent with it. Far from it. Acceptance of our sinfulness means seeing ourselves not for what we wished we were, but for what we really are: we are creations that have gone awry; we are creations who can only exist as we were intended to with the help of God. When we sin, we must seek forgiveness. This means that we tell God that we are truly sorry without equivocations. Even though we have a sinful nature, we must take responsibility for our actions; even though we are prone to transgress, we must do our best not to repeat our transgressions. When someone trespasses against us, we should neither dwell on the offense nor dabble in daydreams of revenge. Instead, we should leave vengeance to God and pray for Him to help us to release the bitterness and pain. When we are forgiven, then our sins will “be blotted out” and there will come to us from the presence of God a “time of refreshing” (Acts 3:19). When we forgive, then we are “a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15 KJV):

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Gratitude

Jemimah Opuni
Biology Pre-Medicine

Scripture Reference:

1 Thessalonians 5:18, Colossians 3:17

Giving thanks is an act to which every child of God should commit. We never know where life can take us, whether good or bad, and in all of these events we must give thanks to God. At times it can be hard. I have experienced it at first hand; the situation my family was going through was making it hard for me to thank God. I believed my family did not deserve the kind of situation we were experiencing, and yet God had a reason for that season we went through. We never know the reason why we are facing some trials; it may be because God wants to test our faith or because He wants to build perseverance in us, but one thing we must do is to hold on to our faith and keep persevering with thanksgiving, knowing that God will answer our prayers. Give thanks day in, and day out; God knows what He is doing!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I come to you today thanking you for all that you have done for me, for my life, and for all the blessings You've showered upon me. Please forgive me for anytime I have not shown my gratitude to you, and always remind of your loving faithfulness and kindness that you have for your children. In Jesus' name, Amen!

God Forgives and Forgets

Martin LaBar

Professor of Science, Retired

Scripture References:

Isaiah 43:25, Hebrews 8:12

2 Chronicles 33:1-20 tells the story of King Manasseh of Judah. Manasseh not only worshipped idols, as many of his predecessors had done, but he also set up objects of idol worship in the Temple, the place consecrated for worship of God. And that's not all. He sacrificed one of his own sons, by fire, to a false god. God saw to it that Manasseh, and others, were taken off, in disgrace and humiliation, as captives to Babylon.

But that isn't the end of the story! Manasseh repented, and God forgave him. Manasseh was released from captivity, and re-assumed his position as king of Judah. He proved that his repentance was genuine by trying to undo the evil he had done. It's remarkable that his captors let him go back as king. It's even more remarkable that God forgave him. But He did, and He will.

Once, I was asked to speak on abortion. I hadn't spoken about it before. I didn't have sense enough to see what was coming when a high school girl, who was present, made an appointment to see me privately. What was coming was that she had had an abortion and wanted to talk about it. The Holy Spirit helped me, because what I said to her was this: "Do you know what you are, in the eyes of God?" She didn't know. I said "you're a virgin!" And she was. (See the Scripture References, which tell us that God forgives and forgets sin.) We sometimes have a hard time forgiving and forgetting what we have done, but God doesn't.

Prayer:

Father God, thank you with all my heart for forgiving me, and for forgetting my sins. There is no way I can repay this. Help me not to sin again, but, if I do, to immediately ask forgiveness and resolve to keep from repeating what I've done that I shouldn't, or not done that I should have. Help me to forget the past and live for you, not me, in the future. In Christ's name.

Adoption

Paul Shotsberger

Scripture Reference:

Galatians 4:4-7

Many of us know in our minds that we are sons and daughters of the Most High God, as the Galatians verses say, but the full revelation of that relationship has not entered our hearts. The unfortunate effect of this is that many of us still live as slaves. We are slaves to people's opinions, to the world, to our own desires, and to satan's temptations. Most of all, we are fearful. We fear other people and we also fear God, but not in a good way. For so many, the view of God is the hard taskmaster who is ready to punish us if we mess up, and our service to Him is carried out as a slave. The Galatians verses are a revelation that we need to rediscover every day: to know that through our adoption into God's family we are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, that we are accepted and loved by Him, no matter what; to know, as Philip Yancey says, that "There is nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less"; to rest in our relationship with God and find peace when the world is falling in around us; to see people not as an opportunity to build ourselves up or improve our own self-esteem, but as sheep needing a shepherd; to minister from an abundance of love, rather than from deficit. When we truly receive this revelation, gradually, the death grip of fear is loosened, and we begin to see ourselves and others differently. We are led, not by our own desires, or the opinions of others, but by the Holy Spirit. In this way, we show ourselves to be the sons and daughters we are!

Prayer:

Thank You, Father, God for adopting me into Your family and making me a child of Yours. I confess that sometimes I think and act like a slave. Change my heart, take away the fear, and allow me to be led by the Holy Spirit every day.

Communion

Aaron Brickle
Media Communications

Scripture Reference:

Matthew 26:17-30, Ephesians 4:32

Often times, we take Communion for granted. We partake, but we glance over its significance. This is His body, broken for you; this is His blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins, etc... But let's pause on that for a minute.

His blood was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins so that we can "commune" with Him (hence the word "Communion"). But I think, with that forgiveness, there is an expectation of us. We must forgive others, for we are forgiven (Ephesians 4:32). Speaking from experience, this process is one of the hardest things a person can be asked to do. Forgiveness is a challenge; it is a test of strength, character, and faith in God.

I've struggled with forgiveness, and I myself am still learning what forgiveness truly is. But I know that I must forgive. How can any of us hold onto bitterness against someone who has wronged us, and then expect forgiveness from Someone we ourselves put on the cross? Our sins killed a Man, and still He offers us intimacy, but most of us will disown anyone who says an unkind word about us. And that's human nature. The only way we can forgive is if we take on the character of God. We must offer our hearts to God so that he can transform us, and bring us to a point where we see our offenders as He sees us. Everyone is broken and sinful, but no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank You for the forgiveness You offer. Thank You for giving of Yourself to save me, even though I don't deserve it. Change my heart so that I am willing to forgive, as You have forgiven me. Help me to love others, because You love them. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Fear He Knows

Aaron Brickle
Media Communications

Scripture Reference:

John 14:27

“Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.”

As Jesus was preparing His disciples for the trials ahead of them, He told them this: “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you.” This is absolutely profound. He gave “his own peace.” Understand, He knew full well the kind of horrible death He was about to experience. Yet He was at peace, because of His trust in the Father - and he admonished His disciples to have the same peace.

The key here is that this peace comes from trust in God. Because we trust Him, we can have peace in the assurance that He is in control. When Jesus said this, He also foreknew the trouble His disciples would go on to experience. Still He tells them: Do not be afraid. Trust. So the disciples trusted; then, when faced with unimaginable persecution, they had peace.

As His modern disciples, God offers us that peace too... the peace to face our trials, our losses, and to face the unimaginable things lurking around the corner. All we have to do is trust. It is not easy, there's no way around that; but when storms come, you find a shelter in the peace of Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for loving me even though I don't deserve it. Thank You for making Yourself available to me, and granting me peace through trust. Help me to trust You wholeheartedly, leaving no room to doubt Your goodness. Change my heart. I ask for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

God is Faithful, Always

Mikkaela Bailey
History

Scripture Reference:

Esther 8; Hebrews 10:22-25 (NIV)

Imagine being dragged from the comfort of your home, thrust before great and powerful men, and suddenly someone tells you that you must break rules and reveal a truth about yourself that could result in your death. This is the story of Esther and God's faithfulness toward her. Essentially, God chose her to be the instrument in His plans to bring justice to the Jews after a plot of genocide was enacted against them. The odds were stacked against Esther, but God's plans prevailed and a creative solution was reached. Success depended on Esther and the other people God chose to use in His plans of hope for the Jews.

Faithfulness walks hand in hand with hope, trust, and promise. God is a God of promises, and He makes them with the intention of fulfilling them. It is part of His character. The hope of fulfillment comes from our response to God. We have the opportunity to trust in Him and depend on His faithfulness, which is a wonderful expression of trust on both God's part and ours.

"Mutuality of Obligation" is a fancy term simply meaning that both parties in a relationship must be fully engaged or else the agreement is null. So, if we (God's children) are not trusting of God then we are going back on the arrangement made, and He is not obligated to remain faithful.

But He does remain faithful to us, regardless. He loves us so much that He entrusts us with amazing responsibilities, and He provides us with a great hope and the assistance needed to carry out the task. Despite our failings we are constantly reminded that He will be faithful to us because it is His nature, and because He loves us so dearly. No matter the odds against us, whatever they may be, God will prevail; this is our constant hope.

Prayer:

Father, give us the strength to trust in Your constant faithfulness and hope for the things You will do in our lives. Produce the necessary boldness in our hearts, give us endurance, and encourage us with Your love. Remind us daily of Your great strength and unfailing love as we explore the depth of Your faithfulness more and more. Help purge our minds of doubts about You and Your promises. Amen

Blinded So That We Can See

Aaron Brickle
Media Communications

Scripture Reference:

Acts 9:1-17

When God wants your full, undivided attention, you can be sure He will get it. He got it from Saul, on the Damascus road. But let's be real - I don't think most of us want so shocking a revelation. Paul was blinded; scales covered his eyes until the only thing he could see was Christ. Was that an enjoyable process? I think not.

Sometimes God has to put us in the dark so that we can see His light. Those might be dark circumstances, emotionally, physically, or even economically. But in those dark moments, we learn something profound about God. He loves us so much that He will allow those circumstances in our lives so that we will seek Him. Our extreme circumstances can demonstrate His extreme devotion to having us by His side. All we have to do to realize this is simply take off our blinders, and see Christ.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Thank You for Your extreme love for me. Thank you for loving me enough to let me see the dark, so that I can experience Your light. I know You're doing it for my good. I'm sorry for my stubborn heart; help me to overcome it and to seek You always. Amen.

What Has God Called Me To Do?

Mikkaela Bailey
History

Scripture Reference:

Romans 1:1-6; Romans 8:9-17

There is a challenge to the people of God who look to serve Him but do not feel a call to the ministry. It is difficult to find a place in the kingdom where I am serving God but also fulfilling my own dreams. I sometimes feel pressure to serve God in a greater capacity by entering a ministerial vocation, where I can live my life in service to God. But, there are more options available.

God calls people to do a variety of jobs in His service because He calls people to be His. What I mean by that is: God calls us to be Christians first and foremost. Perhaps you feel called to become a pastor, or a teacher, or even a CEO. These are all places where God can be honored, and they all present an opportunity to serve Him. It is pursuing a relationship with Him that should be our priority.

When C. S. Lewis came to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, he did not give up his prestigious career as a professor and scholar of medieval literature. He simply put God first, and Lewis was led down a path that suited his talents, desires, and God's plans. Dreams and talents are gifts from God, so if He has not called you to full time ministry, it does not mean that He has not made a plan for your life. It simply means that His plans involve a different set of skills and a different locale.

If we pursue God first, and leave the rest to Him, calling will not be a concern. Following the dreams He gives us and seeking out opportunities to use the talents He has blessed us with will prepare us for His plans for our lives. Keeping our sights on Him and His will is our calling, and our vocation is just one small expression of that calling. Whether you are an English major, a Criminal Justice major, or a Christian Ministry major, God has called you to follow Him. Rest in the assurance that everything else will fall into place so long as you allow God to be your guide.

Prayer:

Father, bless those reading this today with Your peace and inspiration. Reveal the talents and dreams You have given to them, and reassure them that Your will is good. Send them reminders of Your love for them. In all things, help us to put You first and pursue You above all other things. Thank You for the simplicity of the calling You have given all of us, to only follow You where You lead. Thank You for making the plans for our lives because they are good and right and fulfilling.

Waterfall Faith

Dr. Todd S. Voss
President, SWU

Scripture Reference:

Matthew 8:26

As we approached the Gauley River rafting site in West Virginia, I questioned the wisdom of this decision. While I had agreed a year earlier how “fun” this would be, somehow I felt “apprehension” today. But how hard could this be?

With helmets and paddles distributed, I looked for the rafts, but none were visible. Then the guide indicated a drought had lowered the river making rafts too wide for the rapids, so we would all be in individual kayaks. “How many have kayaked before?”, asked the guide. Only I was the novice. “Looks like extra training will be needed for this one,” said the guide. Apprehension turned to fear. As we entered the river, I was taught how to paddle and spin, and then off we went. Just as I was getting comfortable, we were signaled to paddle to a big rock to view the first waterfall. First WHAT?

The guide explained explicitly how to conquer the 25-foot plunge, focusing on staying in the Kayak as the nose went underwater on the downside. “Have faith,” he said. I hoped he was just pulling my leg, but then over he went. Everyone but me followed.

My mind was racing. How do I get out of here? Cannot crawl down, cannot paddle back. The guide called to me from below. Then it hit me. He was right. What was in front of me would take faith. Not in myself, but in my guide. To forge a wild river and survive the falls, trust the one who has mastered it. In that moment of inspiration, I paddled toward the narrow opening, raised my paddle and over I went. As my kayak popped back up out the water, my fear turned to exhilaration and thanksgiving. Several more waterfalls were to come, but somehow, they seemed achievable. On the return trip, I marveled at the faith lesson I just learned.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for the lessons of life that remind us to follow our guide, Jesus. We can have faith because He is trustworthy. No matter what fear, challenges or “waterfalls” await, He has been there, and he calls for us to follow Him. May we never forget, our Guide has mastered it all.

Spiritual Gifts

Emily Bashlor
Elementary Education

Scripture Reference:

Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Everyone has their own unique talents and unique abilities. This simple truth has been explained multiple times and in multiple ways. No two people are the exact same, and no two believers worship, serve, or give in the exact same posture as another. However, everyone's talents and abilities, though vastly different, can be used for the good of the Lord and for His glory. As Christians we are called to find, understand, and use our spiritual gifts to the best of our abilities for the honor of God. Once you figure out what you are talented at and your spiritual gifts are, you will be able to understand more fully and clearly what your mission is for God's kingdom. We are called to take our specific talents and use those for the good of the Lord. So often Christians allow their spiritual gifts to go to waste because they believe that they are not talented enough or because they are jealous of another person's gifts or abilities. As Christians we are called to be confident in the gifts God has given us and use them for His glory.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank You for instilling in me specific and special talents and abilities. Thank You that you have empowered me to understand my specific gifts and use them for Your glory. Please give me the confidence and strength to use my spiritual gifts for Kingdom building. Amen.

Excuses, Excuses

Savannah McCollum
Business & Religion

Scripture Reference:

Galatians 1:10; Jonah 1:1-3; Deuteronomy 28:1-2

From my own experience, I know how difficult it is to not compare yourself to those around you. I am ashamed to say that I once was so wrapped up with how I compared myself to others that I became unwilling to help lead or serve in any position for which I felt I was not good enough. I can remember thinking I was not good enough to lead worship (something I feel God has called me to do). I knew that God was burdening my heart. He wanted me to do this. I was so determined to ignore Him that I came up with every excuse I could until I finally cried to God: "I DON'T WANT TO! I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH!" God always knew this was how I felt. He responded and said: "I want you to, because I am good enough." I was shaken. My foundation of bitterness was broken. My God didn't care about the comparison I had created for myself. He cared about my obedience. Galatians 1:10 tells us not to compare ourselves to others because it is not man we need to please; it is God. In Jonah 1 we read of a call from God for Jonah to go warn the people of their wickedness, but Jonah disobeyed and came up with every excuse not to go. What are your reasons for not listening to God? What are your self-made boundaries that keep you from doing what God wants you to do? That is what I hope you will take away from this: don't let your boundaries or excuses get in the way of what God has asked you to do. Obey Him. There is no greater blessing we can receive than when we obey the Lord.

Prayer:

Dear God, we thank You for the gifts you have given us. We also thank You for the gifts You have given others. Most importantly, we thank You that these gifts are not the same. We praise You for having a greater purpose for our lives than we could ever imagine. Thank You for pushing us beyond the borders we have created for ourselves. Be with us as we struggle to listen and obey Your voice. Help us to overcome our weaknesses with Your strength. We love and praise You. In Your name we pray: Amen.

The Small Things...

Tyler C. Carson
Human Services

Scripture Reference:

Mark 12:41-44

Often we, as people, forget the value of even the smallest detail in everyday life. We walk past the flowers and fail to notice them. We ignore the small, kind gestures that are given to us as we walk around school, our towns and our homes. The small smiles and hugs that we are given are worth more than any amount of money or success. In this passage of Scripture the woman gave all she had, and in doing so she was faithful and happy. Though her offering was minute and would not be regarded as much in the eyes of the world, to the eyes of the Father she had given the most valuable gift of all: her faithfulness and love.

As we go about our day to day activities, let us not forget that the small things we do (such as a high five or a hug) can change the whole outlook of the day. Christ will multiply a little and create out of it unending blessings.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as we go about our daily routines, let us not take for granted the small gifts that are given to us. In not forgetting these small gifts, let us never be boastful of what we can give, but Lord let us be humble and thankful in what we give and receive. Glory to your precious name, AMEN.

Role of the Holy Spirit

Paul Shotsberger

Scripture Reference:

John 14:16-17

Who is the Holy Spirit to you? Is the Spirit some impersonal force, like in Star Wars, that we can tap into when we're in trouble? ("May the Holy Spirit be with you!") Is the Spirit some shimmering bit of light that appears and reappears like Sarayu in the book *The Shack*? Should I be afraid of the Spirit because of what I read in the Book of Acts? After all, He seems to come uninvited and really turn things upside down. Of all of the members of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is by far, for most people, the most difficult to relate to. But one thing that is hard to escape in the Bible is that the Spirit's role in our lives is described using very warm and intimate language. In the John verses, Jesus calls the Spirit our "counselor." The Greek word there is "paraklete," which can mean counselor, but can also mean instructor, helper and advocate. There is a sense of coming alongside the people of God to help with difficulties and decisions. Further, according to Scripture, the Holy Spirit speaks, He searches, He reveals, and He even experiences grief. Do you want to know what God is thinking? Ask the Spirit to reveal it to you. After all, He is God! And He talks to us. And He understands our emotions. We know Him, and can talk with Him, because He lives in us.

Prayer:

Lord, Your Word says that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things. Teach me Lord, through Your Spirit, the path I should take, the things that please You, and how I can bring glory to You through my life.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Caleb W. Southern
History

Scripture Reference:

Ephesians 3:16, 20; Galatians 5:25; Philippians 2:13

It would be impossible to recount every single instance that the Holy Spirit has moved and acted within history. No book could contain a complete list. Let there be no doubt that the Spirit has—and is—moving in history (and the present moment). One question remains: “How?” In Ephesians 3:16, 20, Paul prays for the movement of the Spirit in the church of Ephesus. “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.... Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” Notice that the work of the Holy Spirit in history begins as a personal work within us. God gives us inner strength by the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work, which is so incredible we cannot even think or imagine it! The Holy Spirit is the most intimate person of the Trinity at work in our everyday lives because He lives within us. Paul writes in Galatians 5:25, “Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” The Holy Spirit lives inside the Christian man or woman and He is directing and leading. The Spirit moves in history through His power at work within everyday, average people. We simply need to be faithful to follow. God is doing all the “hard work” by His Spirit: “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Philippians 2:13). Keep your eyes open for how the Holy Spirit may be leading in your life! The next movement of history is not far in the future.

Prayer:

God the Father, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to live within me. Holy Spirit, thank You for leading, counseling, and guiding. Thank You for power that You pour into my life. Help me to truly believe and to be fully open to receiving that power. Holy Spirit, move in my life so that You can accomplish Your next movement in history through me! Amen.

Bold Obedience

Julia Grace Rink
Biology Education

Scripture References:

2 Timothy 1:6-7; Acts 3:7; Acts 4:12-13, 31; Hebrews 4:12

When I was 12, I was standing behind the most popular girl in school, and, for the first time in my life, I experienced the Holy Spirit. Before I knew what I was doing, I'd tapped her on the shoulder and asked her if there was any way I could pray for her or her family—and she broke down in tears. She confided in me that her brother had cancer. It was in that moment that I realized how alive and active the Spirit still is.

At this point in my life, I knew very little about being a Christian, yet the Holy Spirit used me. The disciples Peter and John were called “uneducated, common men,” but when they stepped out in faith, they brought a lame man to walk! And when they unapologetically proclaimed to rulers and elders that “there is salvation in no one else” but Jesus, they were set free from custody!

Our God loves it when we are bold in Him. He has given “us a spirit not of fear but of power,” so that we can be bold. Don't have the mindset that God can't use you because you're not smart enough. If you're waiting until you feel ready, you'll be waiting for a long time. God empowers us, having already given us “the gift of God which is in us.” So “fan into flame the gift of God,” Spirit-filled Christian!

Prayer:

Glorious Father,

Thank You for putting your Spirit in me and for calling me equipped. I pray for Your Spirit to be alive and active in me more and more every day. Present me with opportunities to do Your good and perfect works. Use me today, Father. I ask that You would embolden me to disciple Your lost people. Set a fire in my soul that cannot refrain from being seen. It is in the powerful name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

The Courageous

Dynestee Fields

English

Scripture Reference:

Joshua 1:9, Acts 2

The book of Joshua can easily be called the book of boldness. It begins with the declaration that it was time for the Israelites to claim the promised land, a space that was currently inhabited by several formidable nations. To eradicate any fear that could hinder their progress, God gave the command three times for the group to be strong and courageous, “for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” In the New Testament, we find that God eventually gave the Christians boldness through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the second chapter of Acts we see Peter, freshly baptized by the Holy Spirit, boldly preaching the salvation which comes through Christ, resulting in the salvation of three thousand souls. Boldness is a gift through the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus and are baptized in His name. Christians who are acting according to the Word of God should never fear, “for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Prayer:

Father, thank you for giving me the gift of the Holy Spirit. You said in Your Word that if I accept Christ and am baptized in His name, that I shall receive the Holy Spirit. So, I am assured that I have the boldness that I need to stand up for what is right, and to accomplish what You need for me to accomplish. Thank you for being with me always. In Jesus’s name, I pray. Amen.

Grindin' (Perseverance)

Chandler Ragsdale
Christian Ministries

Scripture Reference:

James 1:2-4

Okay, so let's be honest, the word *grind* just sounds painful. It's something that most of us are scared of or don't like to do very often. When being challenged to keep grindin' onward, or persevere the first thing you need to know, right off of the bat, is that God will lead you home. He will lead you through it if you trust in Him. He is a perfect God, and He is truthful. So if He says it, you better believe that He means it. Now that we have that established, we get to the messy part about perseverance, which is being able to see the purpose of our trials. God sends us through trials, or hard times, and they test our faith, will, strength, and devotion. They break us down and bring us to our knees. So, how do we respond to that? We've already established that we need to trust that God will bring us home, but God also wants us to consider going through these trials as joy! What? God calls us to love going through these trials. We may question this at first, but God shows us that there is a purpose to our trials. We also like to worry about how trials affect our lives. But we must remember here that God's will is perfect, and He knows exactly what we need. We also must remember that God loves us through it all. Why is this significant you may ask? It's significant because without His love, we'd be nowhere in the first place. So since He loves us through it all, we can trust that His plan is taking place, and that He has never, nor will He ever, leave us. At the core of all of these trials and hard times, we have God's love and friends. That's all we will ever need.

Prayer:

God, thank you for shaping me and challenging me through the trials I face day in and day out. I love You, God, and I know that Your will is perfect. I surrender my life to you. Have Your way with me, send me through every trial necessary, help me to do my best to make it through them and glorify you in the process. I know I have Your love, and that is all I need. Help me to remember this throughout the day. Amen.

Finding Joy

Emily Bashlor
Elementary Education

Scripture Reference:

James 1:2-3, Romans 15:13, Isaiah 12:6

James 1:2-3 states, “consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” When reading this, I know that I question how my trials could possibly bring joy into my life. How could my stress, my anger, my hurt, bring me joy? This has been, and still is, a long journey. I think something that stops a lot of us from understanding the concept of joy is the inevitable fact that we have trials, and that we are going to have to persevere through the trials and have joy regardless of the stage of life we are in. While this is a hard thing to grasp, it is such an amazing and encouraging thing that is given to us freely from God. I find it extremely encouraging that we can constantly have the joy that comes from God regardless of the situation or problems surrounding us. As I have been understanding this and accepting this more and more, I have been able to find more peace and rest in my life. Perfect joy comes with perfect peace, and this is a constant thing, never wavering.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank You that You have given us the chance to find joy in our lives. Thank You for showing us what it means to persevere and find joy even in the trials. Thank You, God, for the constant peace that comes with joy. Allow us to continuously and constantly run after You and find joy in every moment of that journey. Thank You that we can find joy in Your empty tomb. Amen.

Promises Kept

Dynestee Fields
English

Scripture Reference:

Genesis 16:1-16; 17:1-27, 21:8-14

Imagine that you are Abraham. You were seventy-five years old when God first promised you a son, and not just any son, but a son who would produce an entire nation. You are almost ninety now, the clock has been ticking, and you still have absolutely no children. Alright, you can stop imagining now, because by this time maybe you too feel impatient and unbelieving.

Instead of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, Abraham chose to try to fulfill His promise for Him by having a child by his wife's handmaid, Hagar. The consequences that issued from Abraham's decision were painful. The son who was born did not have the destiny of the promised child, and when God did bring His promise to pass years later, Hagar and her son were sent away from Abraham's presence.

Abraham's story shows us that when we attempt to fulfill God's promises for Him, we are bound to hurt ourselves and others. Just as Abraham eventually got Isaac, the promised son, Christians should know that God is just as faithful to fulfill His promises to them without needing their interference. It is best to rely on our Father to do things in His timing, which is always the right timing.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I choose to submit to your timing, because I know that your plans are what are best. Thank you for the many blessings that you have in store for me, and for sending your only Son to die for me. In Jesus's name I pray, amen.

Eternal Worship

Paul Shotsberger

Scripture Reference:

Isaiah 43:20-21

Did you know that we were actually created to praise God? Eternity is going to be just one big lovefest – us loving God and God loving us. Praise, then, will be natural in this environment, like speaking or breathing. It is what will naturally (one might say supernaturally) come out of us for all eternity. We literally won't be able to help ourselves; we will spontaneously break out in praise every moment of eternity! So, here's a question: if in eternity we will be unable to stop praising God, and if we really were created to do this, why is it that here on earth we have such a hard time even beginning to praise God, let alone remaining in an attitude of worship the way the Bible says we should. In I Thess. 5 it says that we should "rejoice always...[and] give thanks in all circumstances." In Eph. 5 it says we should "speak to each other using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," and we should sing and make music in our hearts to the Lord, "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Do we do this? If not, what is preventing us? One reason might be that we don't understand the revolutionary effect praise can have on our lives. We need to understand that praise increases the godliness (the fruit) in our individual lives while decreasing the things that displease God. We begin to see our lives as God sees them, and we begin to desire the things that God desires. This, finally, gives us a way to have victory in our walk with Jesus every day, not just every once in awhile.

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for creating me to praise you. Thank you that my worship is so important to You. I bless you Father that eternity spent loving You and being loved by You can begin right now, wherever I am.

Community

Paul Shotsberger

Scripture Reference:

Ephesians 2:17-22

Paul pictures the church as a building, a spiritual temple, being built literally with each of us as a living stone in the building. But we're not just a pile of bricks, indistinguishable baked clay with no life in us. God has created us with unique giftings that are important to this spiritual building. Further, he has given us a moral will, the ability to choose. The question we face is, will we only be part of God's building project on Sundays? Will we try to wriggle free from our place in the structure on Monday in order to construct some other edifice, maybe an academic building, or a business park, or a sports complex? Then on Sundays, will we come running back to God's building? Jesus, the cornerstone, along with the prophets and apostles, are the foundation, and they aren't moving. What about us? Will we stand by our brothers and sisters throughout the week, assisting with God's building project through our commitment, our prayers, our time and energy, our participation in church and discipleship groups, and our service to the community? In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers this insight on community: "...an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart."

Prayer:

Praise You Lord for the privilege of community, for the profound opportunity of being part of Your Kingdom. Thank you for the purpose, calling and significance that comes from living life with Your body, the church, here on earth. Let me never take it for granted.

Selfless Service

Jared Potter
Youth Ministry

Scripture Reference:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Notice how all of these aspects of love deny self. That's because love itself is selfless. This is the same kind of love that Christ has shown us in sacrificing Himself for us on the cross. In the first three verses of this chapter Paul writes,

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV).

Paul is making the point that acts of service without love, selfless love, is dead and without value. So, “works without love is dead” (James 2:26 NIV).

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James says in verse 18 of that same chapter that faith should be seen through works. So now we have this diagram:

Faith without Works without Love = Dead

Go and let your faith be shown through your works done in love so that those who see your faith may come to know that very same faith of the knowledge of salvation in Christ.

Prayer:

Lord, allow me to have faith that can move mountains. And when I have that faith, may I be able to show it through works of service. Allow me to show love through those works so that I may be able to reflect the love that You show me. Pour Your love in me so that I may be able to overflow that love into others. Thank You for all that You have done, am doing, and will do. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

Faith— Fire Tested

Tyler C. Carson
Human Services

Scripture Reference:

Daniel 3:23-26

“And these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, ‘Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?’ They replied, ‘Certainly, Your Majesty.’ He said, ‘Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.’ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’ So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire.”

Have you ever felt your faith being tested? Have you ever felt shy or embarrassed to share your faith with others? We serve a mighty God who is faithful in every way. In the book of Daniel we see a mighty show of faithfulness from the three Hebrew young men. Even greater was God’s faithfulness. The three Hebrews would not bow to false gods. Due to this defiant behavior, the three boys were cast into a burning pit of fire. Amazingly through the protection of God, these boys were not only saved, but also had no visible evidence that they had been in the fire at all!

The lesson here is that whatever our doubts, whatever our fears, we have a God that stands before us. As Christians, we must look to the three Hebrew children as examples of mighty courage and faithfulness before our God. Whether in class, at home, or even in our own private lives, we must have faith.

Prayer:

LORD, thank you for always being faithful. I know that life can be treacherous at times, but the same Jesus who walked in the fire and walked on the water can still walk on the water of my troubles. Blessed is your name. AMEN.

Boldness

Mikkaela Bailey
History

Scripture Reference:

Acts 4

Boldness is courage in the face of despair. When all seems lost, or when things seem impossible, that is when we must stand for what is right. Without boldness, the cause of Christ would never be carried out in the earth. Someone will always stand in opposition, so we must equip ourselves to defend the faith, one way or another.

When things are difficult, we feel like running away. But, if we are to be confident defenders of Christ, we must take a different approach. Boldness is not the absence of fear, but rather the response we should take to fear. In Acts 4, the Apostles were ministering and faced severe consequences for their efforts. As they speak to the other people in the church about the situation, the church is not immobilized by fear, but they instead react by praying to God for greater boldness in the face of danger.

We do not have to depend upon our own strength for the confidence and vitality required of those advancing the kingdom of God in the face of adversity. God provides us with the tools we need to accomplish His calling for the church. Our part in this is to simply be bold enough to ask Him.

Boldness is far from easy for many people. Others may have just a little too much confidence. If you struggle to find the strength to share your faith, ask God to help you overcome this challenge. It is perfectly normal to feel discomfort when you are talking about such a sensitive issue, and many others struggle to stand up for their beliefs in tough situations. But, thankfully, we are blessed to serve a God who is happy to instill us with the boldness required for His service.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the blessings You give us, and for the way You use us in Your wonderful plans. I ask that You give us the strength to be bold today, to stand confidently in our faith despite the trials we might face, and to remain steadfast through all circumstances. Though we may be weak, though we may falter, You remain strong. Remind us of our faith and help us to remember Your goodness when things get tough. When we are faced with opposition, help us to respond to fear with confident faith. Amen.

Being Thankful for Quiet Time

Savannah McCollum
Business & Religion

Scripture Reference:

Colossians 4:2, Psalm 95:2-3

While in college, you will learn to be thankful for many things. You will understand what it means to be thankful for coffee, sleep, free time, etc. With all the assignments and activities that fill your life, the smallest amount of free time will become very special to you. During my fall semester as a sophomore, I learned how to appreciate free time. I was taking 18 credit hours, had a work study job, sang in choir, and still tried to have a social life. I often did school work from 8am to 8pm - no lie. That semester, my relationship with God really suffered. The only time I read my Bible was when I was working on a lesson for church, or I had 10 minutes to spare before my next class. Trust me when I say that this Christian lifestyle is not healthy for your faith and can really damage your relationship with God. I am thankful that my spring semester as a sophomore has been better, and I have been able to spend quality time with God. This past week I was finally able to visit the Potter's Place: a place of prayer and devotion just a 10 minute walk from Southern Wesleyan's campus. There, for the first time in months I rested in the presence of God. I didn't have any school work to do, a game to go to, or friend to meet. I had the Bible, a prayer journal, and my God to keep me company. I will never forget the feeling of gratitude that washed over me as I sat in that little room that seemed so far away from the rest of the world. I tell you this in hopes that you will understand or be reminded of how precious time with God can be, and if you are able to spend some with Him, be thankful. There is so much in our lives to distract us or keep us from "Jesus time," so be thankful when you spend time with God; cherish it.

Prayer:

Our precious Father,

We thank You for planning time in our lives to spend with You without our knowing. Thank You for moving in mysterious ways to allow us to spend time with You. We thank You for people who give us the opportunity to separate ourselves from the world to be alone with You, like those at the Potter's Place. God, we praise You for the wonderful things You do in our lives. We ask that You give us more opportunities to be alone with You. Thank You for being a God that wants to spend time with us. Amen

Our Sabbath Rest

Julia Grace Rink
Biology Education

Scripture Reference:

Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalm 90:12; Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 6:32-33; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 4:11

What does the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” mean to you? Maybe it’s always been of little importance in your life. Well, God actually gave this day to us as a gift, calling it “blessed” and “holy.” Since it is holy, it is to be set apart. God said, “on it you shall not do any work.” God tells us to work hard, even from the beginning of creation “God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” But He also wants us to rest, like He did on the seventh day. “God created man in his own image,” so we should mirror His works by also having a day of rest so that we can grow in His likeness. Of course, our omnipotent God didn’t rest because He was tired, though we can be grateful for finding refuge in this, but He stopped from His labors because of Jesus, who is our Sabbath rest. The Lord has provided us with this blessed day to rest from our works and remember His. Jesus “saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”

It’s not easy to complete the week’s work and rest, but God tells us to “strive to enter that rest.” We must be diligent in our six days of work, “[numbering] our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.” There will be times when the things of this world compete for God’s attention, but stressful times like these require trust in God. He knows what you need, and if you “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” His provisions will be sufficient.

Prayer:

Papa,

I thank you so much for blessing me with a day once a week to spend unhindered time with you. You are my peace and my rest, Jesus. Please give me wisdom throughout my week to do the tasks of the world, so that my mind would be stilled and my anxieties quieted when I freely meditate on You on my day of rest. Jesus, I know You have done everything necessary, but I ask that You would remind me of that when demands of the world seek to pull me away from this precious time You’ve gifted me. I pray this in the name of Jesus, my Sabbath rest. Amen.

The Greatest Love Story Ever Told

Michaela Wickham
Christian Ministries

Scripture Reference:

Romans 5:7-8

“It is rare indeed for anyone to die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

In the beginning humanity was created to be in fellowship with God. Through one decision sin entered the world and humanity was separated from the love of God found in this fellowship. Since that day, God has not stopped pursuing humanity with unconditional and unfathomable love.

When I ponder this, I cannot help but wonder how God feels. What does it feel like to have something that you created with such care run from you? What does it feel like when they cannot find a way back? If we go crazy looking for our phones when we lose them, then how much greater is the love of God that searches for the hearts of humanity. God went to the greatest length necessary to give us the opportunity to, once again, live in fellowship with Him.

Our sinful nature is what separates us from the love of God. We deserve death because of sin (Romans 6:23). But God. God sacrificed Himself for us so that we could live again. This was not out of obligation but out of pure love. God’s love for us is so great that He provides us a way to be with Him again. Even though we did not deserve it, “Christ died for us.” Now, that is what I call a “love story!”

Prayer:

Thank You God for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross so that I could live a life in fellowship with you. I know that I do not deserve the love that You have given to me, but I know that Your love is greater than my sin. God, help me to press on in holiness and not stay in the same place. Guide me, and use me. I am forever Yours. Amen