

*Extra* ORDINARY  
30 DEVOTIONS  
FOR COLLEGE  
FROM

CAMPUS MINISTRIES  
OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



**Extra·Ordinary**  
30 Devotions for College from College

By Students, Alumni, Faculty & Staff of  
Ouachita Baptist University

Campus Ministries  
Ouachita Baptist University

Arkadelphia, Arkansas

Extra-Ordinary: 30 Devotions for College from College

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## Introduction: What Am I Doing in College?

By James Taylor

In 1939 C.S. Lewis addressed a group of university students faced with the difficult task of studying in the midst of World War II—students who were probably asking themselves, “How can I spend my time at school while there’s a war going on and my friends and family are dying?”

Lewis addressed that question partly by recognizing that it’s similar to a question Christians deal with whether in war or peace time:

Every Christian who comes to a university must at all times face a question compared with which the questions raised by the war are relatively unimportant. He must ask himself how it is right, or even psychologically possible, for creatures who are every moment advancing either to heaven or to hell, to spend any fraction of the little time allowed them in this world on such comparative trivialities as literature or art, mathematics or biology (“Learning in War-Time”).

Many of you will identify with Lewis’ scenario. You may be thinking right now: Couldn’t God use me better on the mission field? Why am I studying grammar when people are starving? Would my time be better spent combating one of the many evils in the world, like human trafficking?

Of course a lot of students in the U.S. run the other direction and buy into the idea that college is a break from accountability. For many it’s a guilt-free pause from responsibility: four years to live for yourself without consequences! Why should I worry about other people’s problems during the time of my life?

One answer to both of these perspectives (that college is an example of “fiddling while Rome burns” or a self-centered break from the real world) is to recognize that everything we do—small or big, in college or after—relates to God. God cares about what you do with your time in school. There are no breaks from real life—it’s *all* life.

And, in regard specifically to Lewis’ talk during World War II, I think he would agree that what you do is not more spiritual because it’s “radical” or less spiritual if it appears ordinary. *Radical* is an adjective, not a virtue in and of itself.

It's often through some of the most ordinary, daily, normal activities that God works. Everything we do can be done "as if you were serving the Lord," as Paul writes in Ephesians 6 to slaves about their work.

This is not to say that we don't need missionaries or that one type of education is for everyone. As Lewis continues,

This does not, of course, mean that it is for anyone a mere toss-up whether he should sweep rooms or compose symphonies. A mole must dig to the glory of God and a cock must crow. We are members of one body, but differentiated members, each with his own vocation. A man's upbringing, his talents, his circumstances, are usually a tolerable index of his vocation. If our parents have sent us to Oxford, if our country allows us to remain there, this is *prima facie* evidence that the life which we, at any rate, can best lead to the glory of God at present is the learned life.

To borrow from Lewis, if you and your family have determined college is for you, if God has led you to this spot and keeps you here, then the best way to serve "as to the Lord" is to be a good steward where He has put you. Be a college student to the glory of God. Love the people God has put around you. There is no shortage of opportunities to love your neighbor while in college.

Our hope is that this little book will get you started in the right direction of loving God and your neighbors during your time at college. The habits that you begin to develop as the semester begins will shape your time in college and beyond. And it's our prayer that this book will encourage you that God often works through the ordinary and routine to form extraordinary followers of Christ.



## An Extraordinary Life Lived Drinking Coffee

By Bridget Bloxom

*“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” – John 17:20-21*

**I**n the fall of 2013 I lived in Eastern Europe as a part of the Hands-On program, which pairs international mission work with academic study. On a weekly basis, my life consisted of making cookies in a bakery, washing dishes, and drinking coffee. In the evenings, we were involved in community outreach where we taught cooking classes and English. During the week we reached out to people who lived around us in our apartment complex. We lived life each day prayerfully in a country with less than 1 percent born-again believers, and we watched the Holy Spirit change lives.

In many ways my life that semester was unexpectedly similar to my life at college: I may not have been living in my residence hall, eating breakfast in the cafeteria, or pretending to study in the student center, but I still had lunch dates, coffee visits, and life chats with new friends in new places. I loved my neighbors and invited them over for movie nights and popcorn, while initiating dance parties as often as possible. That all sounds pretty familiar, right?

Our service is about loving God first and people second. I went overseas to serve the Lord in some extraordinary ways, when instead the Lord taught me how service happens in the most ordinary, daily life things. When our commonplace and normal things are done by the great and powerful workings of Jesus Christ in us, extraordinary things take place. God uses the mundane to put Christ on display, which allows me to do these ordinary life things with people who don't know Him. Perhaps it even left them wondering what was so different about this crazy American girl.

Now I see service not as something that is limited to the designated times I have allowed it, but instead as something I do each moment of my ordinary, average, daily life. Service is an opportunity to love God and people wholeheartedly. Through oneness in Him, may we expect God to do some pretty extraordinary things for His glory!

## Disoriented and Distracted? Feel the Bubbles

By J. Scott Duvall

*All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I've never been scuba diving, but I'm told it's a blast. Strapping on those life tanks and exploring the water world below sounds like fun. Of course, it's not all fun and games.

A former Navy diver once told me that he had been in waters so deep and dark that it was almost impossible to keep from becoming disoriented and confused. What a terrible feeling it must be—being under water, unable to see your hands in front of your face, not knowing which way is up, panic engulfing you.

I immediately interrupted my friend. "So what did you do?" I knew he had survived the ordeal since he was standing there talking to me. "Feel the bubbles," he said. "When it's pitch black and you have no idea which way to go, you reach up with your hand and feel the bubbles. The bubbles always drift to the surface. When you can't trust your feelings or judgment, you can always trust the bubbles to get you back to the top."

I have no intention of ever diving that deep and getting myself into that situation, but it's nice to know that I could always "feel the bubbles" as a reality check. Life is like scuba diving in that we need a way to determine what is real and true. Sometimes in life we get disoriented and desperate. At other times, we find ourselves drifting aimlessly. Distractions come at us by the minute.

God knew that we would need instructions and examples about how to live. In the 66 books of the Bible, we have a reality library—stories, letters, guidelines, and examples from God to tell us what is true and real. In a world that is changing faster than we can imagine, we have something stable, true, and real. The Bible is our reality book, an amazing gift from God, who loves us deeply and desires a relationship with us.

As you battle distractions coming at you non-stop, sometimes you will need a stronger “yes” to help you say “no” to the things that don’t really matter, to help reorient you to what is really important. While it’s easy to say we believe the Bible, perhaps it’s time to renew our devotion to listening to God’s voice through His Word. There is nothing like God’s truth to drive away the dark of a disoriented world.

## His Eye Is on the Sparrow

By Libby Hilliard

*“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” – Matthew 10:29-31*

One of my favorite places to be is an area on Lake DeGray that’s not too far from campus. It’s small and tucked away, with the picnic tables hidden from the view of the road, so I can actually count on my visit being solitary. To me, an introvert, the silence and beautiful surroundings do not bore me but envelop me like a giant hug comforting and reviving, and helping me along in my studying.

This particular time I came completely alone—no human company, as usual, but also no homework. My coming was an unplanned move of desperation, and I settled on the bench of a picnic table to pray. My eyes remained open as I spoke audibly to my Creator, the Creator of both my environment and me. Though sometimes we forget words, I find I am less likely to forget feelings, for I remember my confusion and frustration.

Life is hard, full of responsibilities and unknowns. At times it seems to be a journey in the dark, with a dim flashlight only lighting the very next step in front of me. My steps seem of varying importance, sometimes of eternal magnitude and the next moment, of no consequence at all. Here, at the lake on this day, I felt small.

At that very hour in the same part of Lake DeGray, a large turtle bobbed its head from under and over the surface of the water. Its movements were slow and seemingly of no importance. But a twinge of envy struck me as I watched it. You, turtle, have no life to retreat from. This is you, living life in its simplest form. Still, without even knowing, you have touched me.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 10:29-31 echoed in my head. I knew then that I was not the only one watching this creature. If God cares for sparrows and turtles in their simplest lives, how much more does He care for me? How much more value does He place in my seemingly insignificant steps?

Yes, you and I are the crown of creation, for He made us and called us very good. We have been blessed with responsibilities but they do not go unseen. Where I give only a few minutes, He absolutely can spend all day watching His creation, this turtle. And He does, causing no stretch in His ability to watch each and every one of us too. Fear not.

## He's Your Father

By James Taylor

*Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.*

– Matthew 6:9 (NLT)

**M**y two sons are five and three years old, but I still feel like a new father from time to time. That may be due to the fact that there are new things to learn at each stage of childhood, along with new struggles and joys. Without a doubt, my favorite part of being a dad is the moment I walk in the door from work and hear the excited screams of “Daddy! Daddy!” I know they won’t always react that way, but I’ll enjoy it while it lasts. I also know that the joyful cries of “Daddy” aren’t the only ones even now. They call my “name” when they’re scared, when they have a question, when they need something, and sometimes they say it while rolling their eyes.

When Jesus teaches His followers to pray to God as “Father,” there’s a mixture of familiarity and respect—intimacy and esteem—that can often remind us of our relationships with our own parents. But we also know that not every parent-child relationship is wonderful. For some, the idea of “father” conjures up feelings of abandonment, abuse, or silent distance. For many of us, we can’t help but think of God as Father without projecting a little of our earthly dads onto Him, for better or worse.

Still, we need to be careful of thinking of God that way. He is above and beyond the best characteristics of all earthly parents without any of their weaknesses. The Father’s love for the Son is eternal. And God has adopted us as His children. He really cares. He really listens. He really disciplines. He really forgives. No matter how good or bad your earthly father and mother are, you have a heavenly Father who infinitely loves you.

We should view our relationships on earth as they are modeled in heaven, not the other way around. In his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, Stanley Hauerwas writes, “We do not call God Father because we have had or have not had a positive experience of being a father’s child. Rather, all human fathers are measured and judged by the Father’s love of the Son.”

When you pray to God, remember He is your Father. You should treat Him as holy, but you also can ask Him for bread.

## As for Me & My House: We Will Bury Our Idols

By Joseph R. Dodson

*And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."*  
– Exodus 20:1-3

No matter how many times I read the Bible, no matter how many times I teach a class on it, I see things I have never seen before. For instance, until recently, I had missed a fascinating (and convicting) connection between Jacob and Joshua.

Toward the end of his life, Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) gathers people at Shechem. There, he commands them all to bury their idols (Genesis 35). In response, the people offered Jacob all their foreign gods for him to bury under the oak at Shechem (v.4). As a result, the fear of God fell on all the foreigners around them so that no one pursued them (v.5).

Now fast forward to Joshua 24—to the familiar *"Choose this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house . . ."* passage. Before Joshua issues that powerful charge, he calls Israel before him—at Shechem of all places. And what perchance does Joshua command the people to do at Shechem? To get rid of their gods.

Although Joshua nails the role of Jacob, it is unclear how well Joshua's people play the part of Jacob's household. Even though Joshua implores them twice to cast aside their gods, there is no mention of anyone burying their idols—not even of a shallow grave. Perhaps this is also why—in contrast to the first congregation at Shechem—there is no mention of Israel's enemies shaking in their sandals.

It also sheds some light on the summary of the rampant idolatry in Judges 2. As the story of Israel unfolds, it becomes clear, as with Joshua's generation, it's one thing for her to promise to serve the Lord, but quite another for her to bury her gods. And then the personal conviction hits. How often have I publically "committed" my life and my family to the Lord while hiding false idols behind my back? And of course, it's one thing to express grief over our sins, but quite another thing to bury them once and for all.

## Do You Know the Son?

By James Taylor

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14*

God is the main character of the Bible. He's not without mystery or times of silence, but He's always there. Psalm 139 even emphasizes the reality that there's nowhere you can go to get away from God.

His presence takes numerous forms that defy our attempts to explain Him completely and He's often not recognized immediately by those who meet Him. In Genesis 32 He is a mysterious man who wrestles with Jacob; in Exodus He appears to Moses in a burning bush; and many years later in 2 Chronicles 5, He is in a cloud that fills the temple, where the priests could no longer work because "the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God."

God has been present everywhere from the beginning. Still, when Jesus is born, there is something new about the Son's presence. Something unique.

John calls Jesus "the Word" and says He "became flesh and dwelt among us." John is probably making a reference to the tabernacle of the Old Testament—saying that Jesus is the very presence of God in skin and bone. *The Message* says it this way: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."

The Father sent the Son into the neighborhood with a purpose, a mission, as John 3:16 says, so "that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The Son became a human being so that humans could be restored in their relationship with God. By uniting deity and humanity in one person, Jesus became a bridge for us to get back to the Father.

Sadly, right there in the prologue of chapter 1, John foreshadows that the Son won't be recognized by everyone, just as God wasn't always recognized in the Old Testament. Some will have the opportunity to see and touch Him, but they won't truly know Him.



One common way that Christians have often summarized their purpose in life is with the phrase “to know Christ and to make Him known.” It might not be the *only* way to state our purpose in life, but it’s a good phrase that can keep us focused.

Can you say that you’re living your life to know Christ and to make Him known? It’s a daunting task, but it begins with everyday, basic choices. Perhaps today you could start by simply praying Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV) for yourself and your friends: “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.”

## Peace in the Present

By Rachel Wicker

*“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

– John 14:25-27 (NIV)

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* – John 16:33 (NIV)

For as long as I can remember, I’ve struggled with contentment. As a kid I moved a lot. And with each move I wanted to be either back at the previous place or on to the next one, never really being satisfied with the present. For me, college was no different.

I desperately wanted to be overseas, living in a different culture and experiencing God’s work in and around me in new and exciting ways. And while these are noble goals, my focus was so misplaced. I couldn’t see how college would truly satisfy me or benefit me at all, but I wasn’t daring to let God use this season too—as He had the previous one or would for the next one. It wasn’t until I began studying Scripture deeply, in classes and for myself, that I began to see that I am not alone in this feeling.

I learned that, as believers, we are always living in this weird in-between. We know that in God’s grand story we have a great future hope and promise to one day be reconciled with Him completely, but for now we live in a world with sorrow and hardship and pain. So, it is only natural for us to feel discontent with the things of this world. This world is not our home, and there will always be a longing in us for something more, something greater to fill us and complete us.

This is where Jesus’ words bring so much hope. We know that in the end, He has overcome the world and will one day come again to fully bring us back to Himself. In this weird in-between time, however, He’s given us the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us peace. He can and wants to use us in this world to be His hands and feet, to share His peace as He has given it to us. While it is often

tempting to see this as starting with our careers or “future,” God can use you and me, right here and right now.

Take a few minutes to listen to the Holy Spirit, the bringer of peace, and thank Him for the present—for this season, as chaotic or often mundane as it can be—for this, too, He will use! One day you will look back on these years and praise Him for the good, the hard, and the growing. But for now it is a beautiful thing to trust in the Lord and understand that just as He was faithful then, He is faithful now, and He will be faithful always.

## Following God into the Unknown

By Haley Martin

*The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

– Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)

Entering college we step into a world of the unknown—away from our family, the familiar, our comfort zone. However, God uses such times in our lives to pull us toward Himself. In my own life, I started college with the determination to be involved with absolutely every opportunity. Though my determination may have been well-intended, “everything” was not what God wanted for me. I packed my life so incredibly tight that I was able to justify my increasing distance from the Lord. I thought, “I am busy, God, and I can take care of this.” I convinced myself of this a lot. I was afraid of listening to what God wanted me to plug into in case I didn’t like what I heard.

But I burned out and soon realized my need for God’s plan to be done in my life, even during the times of unknowing. As Christians, sometimes we are called into the unknown. We are to live boldly under any circumstance.

In this passage, God calls Abram to be courageous, and, most importantly, to *trust* that God is faithful. Abram is about to leave everything he’s ever known and journey to an uncertain destination—God just says, “The land I will show you.” Though Abram may have no idea what his life will look like from that moment forward, he embraced the unknown, and trusted God to bless him and make of him a great nation. What freedom he must have found in this!

Do you think the disciples knew what their lives would look like when Jesus said, “Follow me”? My guess is they did not know the joy and fulfillment that their life would hold when they gave it up to follow Christ. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:38-39, “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Sometimes losing your life for the sake of Christ can be scary, but Jesus promises it is worth it. Following Jesus into the unknown is the best choice someone can make because God loves endlessly, provides continually, and blesses generously. Thank God today for the times of uncertainty. It is in these moments when we see our weakness and need to lose our life for the sake of our Lord. God's promises are never void. Praise Him for that!

## God Isn't Silent

By James Taylor

*And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

– Exodus 3:6

**M**y five-year-old said to me one night, "Dad, why can't we hear Jesus?" Believe me when I tell you that all the theology in the world can't help you dodge the honest questions of a preschooler. He has asked me harder questions since then, but this one sticks in my memory. We all wonder it at times; we're all frustrated with spiritual silence from above when we need direction or an answer.

God is a speaking God in the Bible from beginning ("Let there be light") to end ("Surely I am coming soon"). He speaks and reveals Himself throughout Scripture, but that doesn't mean that the Old Testament heroes got an audible word from God whenever they wanted, or that the disciples of Jesus always understood what He was saying. They also dealt with times of silence, frustration, and doubt. And when He spoke, they were often shocked at what He said. Look at Moses' reaction in Exodus 3!

If you're struggling because you really wish you could "hear" a clear word from God, remember two things. First, God *has* spoken and He inspired people to write His Word in Scripture. He won't lead you today toward anything that contradicts what He's already said. He is the same God, as he told Moses, "I am the God of your father."

Second, the question throughout the New Testament is not whether God has spoken, but whether we are listening. If God wanted to speak to you in a whisper today, is there enough quiet and space in your life that you'd hear it? Are you reading His Word? Are you receptive to other Christians whom God may be using to speak to you?

## A Guaranteed Inheritance

By James Taylor

*In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. – Ephesians 1:13-14*

**H**ave you ever dreamed about a surprise inheritance? That some distant relative you didn't know about had earned a fortune and left it all to you?

We've probably all daydreamed a scenario like that, where we receive a fortune that we did nothing to earn and that is now ours. In real life, I imagine that I would be pretty skeptical of any such news, whether by a phone call, a letter, or an email. And I probably wouldn't believe it was true until the first dollars hit my own bank account. No matter how good the promise sounded, I would be hesitant if I didn't really know the person making it.

In Ephesians, Paul praises God because He has adopted each of us as His own children and promised us an inheritance that we didn't deserve or earn. Paul closes out this song of praise by emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in these blessings. I love the way that Paul describes the Spirit as part of our past, present, and future salvation: when you believe in Christ, you are "marked with the Holy Spirit" (past), who "is a deposit" (present), "guaranteeing our inheritance" (future).

But the special thing about this deposit is that God doesn't give us some *thing* as a guarantee—He gives us Himself, God the Holy Spirit. He doesn't leave us alone with just a promise. He's right there with us, as Jesus said, "to help you and be with you forever . . . I won't leave you as orphans" (John 14:16-18).

And contrary to the temptation to think of the Holy Spirit as something like the "Force" out of *Star Wars* or as an "it," Christians believe the Spirit is a person, the third person in the Trinity, who unites us to Christ when we believe.

Though there are aspects of our salvation that we'll have to wait for to be completed, God is with us all the way. Specifically, we're sealed with the Spirit the moment we believe, we walk with Him every step of the way, and He will be with us the moment we step into eternal salvation, from that day forward, forever. You are never alone. God guarantees it.

## Everyone Plays Guitar

By David Willhite

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. – Colossians 3:1-4 (NIV)*

College is exciting! It is a fun time of making new friends, sleeping too little, and hopefully studying things that you actually care to learn about. Though there are many parts of college that are fun and exciting, it is still life, and not without its challenges. On most campuses it doesn't take long to realize that the natural God-given talents—that so recently carried you through high school—no longer exhibit the same head-turning attention that you anticipated. Compared to high school, your teammates are stronger and faster. Your classmates are focused and smarter. There are many great singers who can sing high and loud, and everybody can play guitar. Yes, everyone.

This can be a difficult realization. It is easy to trap ourselves in discouraging thoughts of unwarranted negative self-criticism. Likewise, it is easy to forget our identity as we place our significance in ourselves and our talents.

The first-century church in Colossae was also undergoing an identity crisis. The church was attempting to blend Christianity with philosophies and theologies that were inconsistent with the gospel of Christ and the guidance of early church leaders. It was to this church that Paul wrote a reminder of Christ's significance in the life of believers.

There is no doubt that Paul believed there is a specific relationship between believers and Christ. In fact, all three times that the church is the subject of the sentence it is given identity by its security in Christ. This should be encouraging! Paul does not say: "Since, then, you run faster than everyone else . . ." or "When classes, which are your life . . ." Instead Paul emphasizes our foundation in Jesus' redemption of our lives. While it is comforting to know that our earthly qualities (and lack thereof) are irrelevant when compared to the glory of Christ's work in our lives, this comfort does not come without a command.



Paul wasn't just yammering on when he commanded us to set both our hearts and minds on things above. Our identity in Christ is not the focal point of this passage; rather it's the groundwork for Paul's instructions. It is because we are alive in Christ that we seek to live like Jesus. Because Christ is our life, we no longer engulf our minds and hearts in our strengths and talents. It is easy to seek the things we love or even the things that we "feel called to do," but our loves and our "callings" should never be in opposition or put ahead of what we have been commanded to do. The world can survive without the next T. Swift, Kobe Bryant, and Mark Cuban; but it will not survive without the good news of Jesus Christ. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above."

## Jesus Came for Sinners

By James Taylor

*But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, “Why does he eat with such scum?” When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” – Mark 2:16-17 (NLT)*

**W**ould you have the confidence to tell a doctor you thought his diagnosis was wrong? Or to object to a lawyer in court? Or would you walk up to the President and tell him how to run the country (okay, bad example there).

Generally speaking, we respect the opinions of experts and we don’t argue unless we’re on very firm ground. It takes real confidence in your facts to tell someone that they’re wrong—especially if everyone thinks they’re an expert. But Jesus did exactly that with the Pharisees. They were teachers of the Law. They had studied it for years and years. Even so, Jesus told them they were misreading it. He would often say something like, “Haven’t you read in the Scriptures . . . ?” That’s kind of like asking a doctor, “Didn’t you go to medical school?”

See, the Pharisees didn’t like a lot of things about Jesus, but one of their main objections was who He hung around with—prostitutes, alcoholics, and financial cheats. But Jesus didn’t give in to their expertise. Instead, He tells them that though they’ve searched the Scriptures, they’ve actually missed God (see John 5:39-40).

Here in Mark 2, Jesus uses the analogy of a doctor to respond to the Pharisees: “These are exactly the people I came for.” Doctors don’t hang out at the fitness club unless they’re working out. They go where the sick people can find them.

Now Jesus is not saying that there are some people in the world who are so good that they don’t need Him. He’s just dividing the world up differently than we would. We often say people are basically good or basically bad. Jesus says everyone is bad (or sick in this analogy). There are just some people who know it and some who don’t.

So, if you're feeling particularly sinful today, you're just the kind of person Jesus came for. If you didn't recognize your own illness, you'd never go to the doctor. Come to Jesus sick, broken, rebellious, or prideful—that's just the kind of person He spends time with.

## First Things First

By David Willhite

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. – 1 Corinthians 15:3-5*

This world needs Jesus. Every day we need Jesus. In our churches, in our schools, in our communities, in our relationships, we need Jesus. Maybe it's the poverty gap that reminds you of this need. Maybe it's the disturbing number of abortions carried out each year. Maybe it's the millions of people around the world who are afraid of what would happen if they quit worshipping statues. Maybe you are overwhelmed by the need for Jesus when you hear about the groups in Africa creating "child soldiers." Or maybe you crave Jesus' healing when you begin to comprehend that there are millions of women and children enslaved around the world in an attempt to satisfy man's depravity. This world needs Jesus.

Paul understood this need. Going on multiple missionary journeys and writing to many churches across Asia and Europe, Paul stayed focused on the good news of Christ's life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Upon his second missionary journey Paul planted a church in Corinth. As the church quickly fell into division and heresy rooted in their immaturity, Paul responded quickly and reminded them of what he knew to be true. This passage in 1 Corinthians 15 introduces a major discussion of the resurrection as an essential part of the gospel.

Many of us grew up in the church hearing sermon after sermon about the "facts" of the gospel. Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day, and He appeared again to the disciples. It is easy to let this become old news. But for Paul, the gospel never lost its importance in his life because he understood the world's need for Jesus. He did not wait to share God's story when it was convenient for him or when the people seemed interested. No, Paul delivered the news of Jesus "as of first importance." He shared God's story knowing that there was nothing in life more important than sharing Christ right then.

If by God's power Jesus was raised from the grave, then God's power is sufficient for us. It is sufficient for a world in need. His power is sufficient to lead a persecutor of Christians—like Paul—to eventually die for his work for Christ's church. His power is sufficient for those in darkness around the world. His power is sufficient for those starving in Asia and Africa. His power is sufficient to dissolve the practice of abortion. It's sufficient to free the slaves of man from the slaves of sin. Christ's power is sufficient for the needs of the world. And it's sufficient to redeem those caught up in this brokenness. Jesus worked to bring life out death. It is time that His work is of first importance in our lives.

## The Highs and Lows of College

By J. Scott Duvall

*Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.*

– Psalm 143:10 (NIV)

**F**or longer than most of you have been alive, I've been watching students begin college. In August they're always nervous but excited, a bit anxious but ready for "new"—a new place, new friends, new freedoms, new challenges.

Almost every student begins the semester on an emotional high. Then life happens. They have exams and papers and projects. Everything begins to weigh on them. Add in life outside of school, and by November the optimism has usually been replaced by the realism of struggle. I can see the questions on their faces: How can I finish all this? Will I make the grades? Am I cut out for college?

Psalm 143 might help. David, the writer, is at the end of his semester, you might say. He's exhausted, worn down by his enemies and struggling to survive. But in 143:10 he prays a simple prayer.

This prayer speaks two important realities into our lives. First, David asks God to teach him to do His will. That's a process. It's like training for a 100-mile bike ride or a marathon. Spiritual growth is a long-haul process. As God leads you through the ups and down of this coming semester, you can pray that He will teach you to obey Him. Pray that you won't have one life at home and another life at school. Pray that you won't slip into hypocritical or destructive patterns. Pray that God will have your whole heart, a heart that is passionate about pleasing Him.

Second, David can pray this because, as he says, "you are my God." We can trust God. We cry out to the One who loves us and cares about us more than we care about ourselves. We can trust Him even when the emotion wears off and we're left with pure struggle.

## One Body

By Emily Harris

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. – 1 Corinthians 12:12-13*

Rivalries can be fun, and college is full of them. Events between schools and within schools are full of competition, and sometimes they can get pretty heated. But how far is too far?

The Bible says that the church at Corinth was heavily divided over some petty issues—so much so that it was ruining the community they had in Christ. The Corinthians were divided by whom they pledged “allegiance” to as the church leader (1 Cor. 1), by lawsuits (v. 6), and rules about partaking in meat sacrificed to idols (v. 10). Their opinions and preferences were overtaking their identities as Christians and were ruining the community of the church. Unfortunately, the church at Corinth does not always look that different from our own churches.

What do you pledge your allegiance to? Maybe you heavily identify with a particular club, sorority/fraternity, or political party. All of these groups, despite their different strengths, can be used for the glory of God’s kingdom. But when the agenda of these groups takes precedence over your relationship with Christ and His mission in the church as a whole, that’s a problem. Many groups that you might identify with say that they are *for* Christ and have Him as their number one goal, but how is Christ reflected when rivalry between His followers becomes unhealthy? Competition that is meant for fun and good can spill over into the church and divide it.

Groups and clubs in college can help you get plugged in and find a place, but rivalry in the world should never overtake your desire to build up the body of Christ. When you are tempted to adopt an attitude of competition, remind yourself that you identify with Christ first and should act in a way that reflects His character.

## Have Mercy on My Mess, O God

By Amy Taylor

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! – Psalm 51:1-2*

**A**s my kids were playing happily one day, I peeked into the playroom and observed two imaginative boys and their enormous mess. A mess to put all other messes to shame! Toys upon toys upon toys. I knew that my little 3-year-old Tazmanian devil was likely ground zero, though certainly not alone in the shenanigans. Upon seeing me enter and before I could speak, his 5-year-old big brother jumped up, pointed his finger (quite authoritatively) at his little brother, and declared, “*He* did it!” which ultimately turned into: “Well, it was *his* idea.”

Let’s face it: I am a mess-maker too. How often in life do we make messes, and then look for someone else to blame or for an easy escape? We want to escape feelings of guilt and shame, bad reputations, and potential discipline. We attempt to sweep it under the rug, minimize it by comparison, or even play the victim.

If only our sin was limited to toddler-sized messes. But we are capable of just about anything. Prior to writing this psalm, King David had an affair with Bathsheba, and then conspired to have her husband killed. Talk about a mess! Before verse 1, we are told that the prophet Nathan paid him a visit. Whatever he thought about his situation before, David was apparently made quite aware of his sin by the prophet. Can you imagine that conversation? David could have responded in many different ways. He was king after all. But rather than assert his authority, give excuses for his behavior, or pass blame elsewhere, he ultimately recognized the gravity of his sin and cried out for mercy. There was no getting around it. He messed up.

In the New Testament, Paul called himself the chief of “mess-makers” (my translation) and proclaimed that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). And whether the messes we make are giant, toys-upon-toys-sized messes, or the ones that go seemingly unnoticed, we must face them like David did. When my boys do something wrong, they often want to look away or run away—my Tazmanian devil will even shamefully bury his head in



the couch. But there is no restoration in running away. In facing our sin and asking for mercy, we submit to the Father and renew that relationship. And we find freedom from both the guilt and the burden of sin.

Can you face your sin and humbly go to the mercy seat of the Father? Go to Him, like David, empty-handed and brokenhearted. Go without a to-do list of things you'll do better next time—those aren't the basis of your forgiveness. Lamentations 3:22-23 reads, "The steadfast love of the LORD *never ceases*; his mercies *never* come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (emphasis mine). It is according to *His* great faithfulness that we receive forgiveness, according to *His* abundant mercy, which we see most fully in Christ's death for us.

If King David can humble himself before God and receive forgiveness for his adultery and murder, don't you think God will have compassion on you as well? Don't just run away from your mess.

## You're Not Guilty

By Sadie Sasser

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. – Romans 8:1-2*

When I accepted Christ, I was twelve. I “went forward,” was baptized, and my life changed. But when I say my life changed, I mean that some of my behaviors changed: I read my Bible and searched for answers in the Word. I was still living under the law in some sense: if I did the right thing, I would be rewarded; but if I did the wrong thing, I would be judged. It wasn’t anything that my parents said or my church taught—but everyone seemed to praise the righteous and judge the troublemakers. I was not living by the grace that is offered so freely by our God.

In Romans, Paul was writing to a group of believers comprised of Jews and Gentiles. Some of them would have previously lived under the Old Testament Law of Moses while others, who were only familiar with it, came from different religious practices and cultures.

Regardless of our present day religious backgrounds, many of us will identify with the feeling Paul describes in Romans 7:

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?  
(Romans 7:21-24, NIV)

Not only may we feel this struggle internally, but Paul also tells us that none of us can stand perfect before a holy God. Regardless of our backgrounds, we are stuck in sin, without excuse, and face eternal separation from God.

But condemnation is not the end of the story. In Romans 8:1-2, Paul gives the solution to this problem: believers are *not* condemned any longer because of Christ’s work on the cross. The judgment that will come at the end of time is no

longer a fear for us because we already have our verdict: NOT GUILTY by the gift of His grace in Jesus. In other words, we are justified or declared innocent.

Believers in Christ know where their eternity lies. And this brings us to another conclusion: We know we are not under the law of sin, so we do not have to *strive* on our own to please God. We are under the law of the Spirit, who gives us life and fills us with the power to look and act more like Jesus Christ. Your final eternity is immediately determined by your faith in Jesus Christ—and your faith expresses itself, not through attempts to change your behavior under your own power, but through trust in the Holy Spirit who guides you into good works. Rest in the Spirit today, for He is the only true peace and righteousness.

## Thirst for God

By Hannah Ramsey

*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. – Psalm 63:1-3 (NIV)*

**H**ave you ever experienced unbearable thirst? Your throat so dry and cracked that every breath is labored and chafes sharply as you inhale? Your longing for cold, clear water so intense that it consumes your every thought, every calculated action? I remember this type of thirst during many a long distance run in the midst of cross country season. The relief of finally drinking deeply of that fountain at the end of several miles was profound.

Our physical need for water is a parable of a much deeper need we all possess, whether or not we are aware of it. The psalmist says, “Oh God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (ESV). Do you hear the longing, the yearning, the deep *need* expressed within the psalmist’s words? His soul needs God like his body needs water.

Notice the psalmist begins by exulting in the fact that God—the Alpha and the Omega, the Everlasting, Covenant-keeping Lord—is *His* God. He even uses the word “my,” indicating possession. The whole joy of the gospel is summarized in this phrase, “Oh God, you are my God.” No power or authority can reverse this great promise purchased for us by the cross of Calvary: He is my God, and I belong to Him.

When this truth dawns in us, it awakens a deep affection, a longing, a yearning for God. Hear the words of Timothy Keller in his sermon “Discipline of Desire”:

It doesn’t say, “Because I’ve sought you, you are my God.” He says, “Because you are my God, I seek you.” *The way you know you’ve met the real God is that you are hungry and thirsty. And the way you know you’ve really met the real God is that you’re really hungry and really thirsty. And the way you know you’ve sort of met the real God is that you’re sort of hungry and*

thirsty. . . . I'll put it another way, and this is very important to know: *The sense of His absence, the dissatisfaction with His absence, is an evidence that He has touched you.* (emphasis mine)

So my question for you is, Is there any true, real, earnest hunger and thirst for God in your life? I don't mean to ask if you do your daily "quiet times" and attend church every Wednesday and Sunday. (Though those things are important for awakening affection for God.) I mean, does your soul *thirst* for Him? Do you long to simply be with Him, to behold His power and His glory? Do you yearn to know Him more? Do you desire greater depths in your relationship with Him? Is He your treasure, your utmost joy, the object of all your affections?

Consider those things that stir, sharpen, and awaken affections for God in you and pursue them. For me, that often includes early mornings, dark roast coffee, prayer on my knees, stories of martyrs and missionaries, being outside in nature, meditating on passages from Romans, or preaching the gospel to myself. Consider also those things that deaden or dull your affections for God and ruin your appetite for Him, so to speak. Things that turn your eyes away from beholding Him, turn your affections to worldly things, and diminish your thirst for Him. Sometimes those are even morally neutral things. For me, that includes social media and shopping. For everyone this will look differently.

Yet the important question to consider is still, *Am I thirsty?* Is there any measure of thirst for God within me, no matter how large or how small? Behold Him, seek Him earnestly. For this promise is ours in Christ Jesus: His steadfast love is better than life. His steadfast love is better than \_\_\_\_\_. Anything you can imagine to fill in that blank, His steadfast love is better. He and He alone can satisfy our souls. Like living water to a man dying of thirst. There's nothing better.

## God's Will for Your Life

By Bryan McKinney

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

I recall my senior year in college vividly. I was at a threshold moment in my life, as I prepared to enter the “real world.” I had several interesting options before me. What I knew was that I wanted to serve God through my vocation, but I wasn't sure exactly what form that service should take. I had a decent job opportunity. I was considering graduate school in several different disciplines. And I paid two visits to seminaries, wondering if God was possibly calling me into the ministry. I also remained highly interested in pursuing a law degree. Through this journey, I begged God to let me know what “His will” for my life might be. I prayed about it. I meditated on it. I spoke with trusted family members and other mentors about it. And what did I get? For months, I got nothing. I got radio silence.

Then one day I stumbled across what would prove to be a life-altering passage in 1 Thessalonians. It was as though the apostle Paul jumped out of the pages, grabbed me by the hand, and said, “Here, this is for you.” It was through this passage that I came to appreciate the possibility that God's will for my life might be something far more important than who signs my paycheck or whether I have a graduate degree in business or psychology or history.

Scripture tells us that God's will for our lives is to rejoice always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances. For me, this discovery was liberating! I'd been begging God to share with me His will for my life, and He had already done so, a couple of centuries ago.

God can use all of us. Some are called to be preachers. Some are called to be teachers. Some are called to be physicians. Some might even be called to be lawyers. What I do know is that I'm working with a great number of talented young people who surely seem called to be business leaders. These people will make a meaningful difference in the companies and communities where they serve. And I also know that all of us are called to rejoice always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances.

I find myself sharing these verses frequently with students as they attempt to answer the “What’s God’s will for my life?” question. And there’s one thing I know for certain: I’m sure glad God led me to serve in this place at this time. It sure feels a lot like a calling. As I watch my students seeking to find their calling, I have ample opportunities to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks.

## Spiritual Comparison

By James Taylor

*He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” – Luke 18:9-14*

Many Christians have said that pride is the quintessential sin. Not only has everyone felt it or seen it in others, but it’s a main cause of many other sins. Every sin is an elevation of our will over God’s—proclaiming our kingdom over God’s. If pride is at the heart of sin, then comparison is at the heart of pride. C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*: “Each person’s pride is in competition with everyone else’s pride. . . . Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.”

This parable in Luke is told to those who struggle with comparison and pride, so I think that’s all of us at one time or another. Our pride can even be so deceptive that we can use the parable rather than listen to it, and begin to pray, “I thank you that I’m not like the Pharisee!”

College life is not much different from the rest of life, in that you will be tempted to compare yourself with the people around you:

“I’m so blessed that *my* family taught me to make good choices.”

“Thank God I’m not like those drunks.”

“At least I’m not like those ‘holier than thou’ Christians.”

“Can you believe what \_\_\_\_\_ did? I’d never do that.”

(fill in the blank with the people on campus you like to judge most)



See, the problem of self-righteousness is not what you do and don't do; the heart of it is what you think you do better than others, even if that "better" is being more authentic, more "real," or more spiritual.

The tax collector goes home justified (made truly righteous) because he doesn't compare himself to other people. He sees himself next to God. When he makes *that* comparison, he realizes there's no reason to be prideful. All he can do is beg for mercy.

If you ever feel as though you've hit a wall in your relationship with God or you're just not sure how to talk to Him, you can at least echo the plea of the tax collector in this passage: "God, have mercy on me. I'm a sinner." If you never find yourself asking for mercy, you might want to ask yourself why.

## Love God with All Your All

By Sadie Sasser

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. – Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV)*

As Israel heard these words spoken, the people were camped in the plains of Moab, able to look across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. It was land that Abraham had longed for hundreds of years before. When the Hebrews exited from Egypt, the land was present in their minds and was their hope for the future. When the same generation that saw God’s power in Egypt did not trust Him to give them the Promised Land, they were sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness, where all but two members of that generation would die. And now, on the plains of Moab, still longing for the Promised Land but with it in sight once again, Israel hears Moses speak these words to them. It is called the *Shema* (shuh-MAH) and is the Jewish confession of faith even today.

The *Shema* reminds us, first, who God is and, second, how we respond to Him. God is the ruler and creator of all things; He is in control of the large and small circumstances and He has a plan and purpose. Because He is the only true God, we are called to love Him with all we are. In our context, *love* often refers to a feeling, but the meaning of *love* in the Ancient Near Eastern context is one of service. A subject loved his king, meaning he served his king by being loyal and obedient. When Deuteronomy speaks of loving God with all you are, it is referring to serving Him in obedience. You might be imagining “service” as something like a maid or a waitress, but God does not require that type of service. He wants your heart, your soul, your strength, and whatever else you have left. Our service to God is sacrificing ourselves: our human desires and selfishness.

This was quite important to the Israelites. They had been disobedient to God and were denied access to the Promised Land before. While in Moab, they heard their entire history summarized, along with the commands that God had given them. And He was giving them a chance to renew their covenant with Him. Their history is filled with God’s faithfulness and power, His grace and His wrath. Now, Moses is saying to them, “You have to be ready to sacrifice

everything if you want to live in this Promised Land. God’s holiness requires you to change everything. But it is completely worth it.”

It’s not long, sadly, before Israel fails the task of giving God their all. They entered the land but were not faithful, and the land was taken from them; yet, they never completely lost the hope of redemption. We are much like Israel, seeing our failure and God’s faithfulness everywhere. We know that He promised us eternal life in His presence, and we base our hope on that. However, we must realize that our life with Him begins now, and we can’t compartmentalize sections of it away from Him. God wants all of you—every aspect of your life—even the part that you are scared or hesitant to give over to Him.

## A Once-for-All Sacrifice

By James Taylor

*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.*  
– Hebrews 10:12-13

I love the feeling of a completed task, whether that is looking over my lawn after a day of mowing, marking the last item off a to-do list with a triumphant check, or (when I was in school) the joy that came from turning in the last big paper of the semester. Many of you, no doubt, are currently working on papers and looking forward to that feeling in the near future.

When it came to the work of an Israelite priest, his work was never finished. The author of Hebrews tells us that, day after day, the priests repeatedly offered the same sacrifices for people who repeatedly sinned. In addition to the never-ending nature of the task, Hebrews 10:11 says that those sacrifices were actually unable to accomplish the task of taking away sins.

The author of Hebrews wants to make sure we realize that Jesus is a priest unlike any other. Those who follow Christ have an advocate who was able to accomplish what other priests never could with the single act of offering Himself as a sacrifice. Now, not only is Jesus done with offering sacrifices to pay for sins, but we are as well. Though it's tempting to think of our good deeds as making up for the bad we've done, they are as ineffective as the Old Testament sacrifices at taking away sins. Because of what *Jesus* has done, God says, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (v. 17).

Remember that Jesus sat down. The God who once rested after creating the world now sits down after redeeming it. Having completed His task, He sits, rules and waits. There's nothing you can do that would force Him to have to stand back up and offer another sacrifice. He's done it all.

With faith in Jesus Christ, take comfort that your acceptance before God does not depend on what you did yesterday or what's on your plate today.

## Rest Is Good

By Libby Hilliard

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. – Genesis 2:1-3*

**H**ow busy are you? In a world where we carry our contacts in our pockets, we are constantly multitasking, constantly creating, and constantly communicating. Long gone are the days of ceasing work with the setting sun and resuming with its rising. We are sleep deprived and on the move. When we hear “Sabbath,” we do not always think beyond the rabbis shaking their fingers and modern Jewish mothers lighting candles to see its relevance to us. As Christians, we are blessed to be able to rest moment by moment in Christ (Hebrew 4:9-11). In addition we may practice the spiritual discipline of rest by having quiet times (Mark 1:35), taking vacations, going on mission trips, and why not have a weekly Sabbath? Maybe for you, that means not doing homework on Sundays (no, not skipping it . . . get it done on Saturday!), picking another day of the week to block off for rest, or simply turning off your phone one night a week.

For goal-oriented people, rest can be painful. Rest just gives you time to worry about all the things you need to do, right? Not so. God, who is infinite, saw the benefit of resting from His work. How much more should we be willing to rest from ours? The quieting of our bodies and spirit shows God that we are open to hearing from Him and that we value the tasks He sets out for us more than the ones we decide for ourselves.

Every morning during the spring and summer months, my grandfather comes inside from his jaunt through the garden and delivers a handful of daylilies to my grandmother. While she places them in a shallow dish, she and my grandfather whistle in response to the various colors and ruffles, perhaps a combination they haven’t seen the likes of in a while. But the most beautiful thing about daylilies is that they only last one day. They aren’t just another thing to care for—they are another thing to enjoy. My wish for you is the kind of rest and de-cluttered life that allows for stopping, smiling . . . and smelling the daylilies God sends your way.

## Faithful in Little Things

By Emily Harris

*“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” – Luke 16:10*

**I**n high school, one of the biggest decisions you have to make is where to go to college. If you’re reading this, then you probably got past that decision and you might be thinking life is pretty smooth sailing right now. It can feel like that, particularly your freshman year, when you’re just getting connected. However, things often start to get a little more complicated.

At some point in your four years in college, you will have to make decisions concerning majors, classes, organizations, relationships, summer jobs, and your career path. If you’re anything like me, you might not feel prepared to make those decisions. You may feel too young or maybe a little inadequate or even fearful. And it may be that the true desire of your heart is to honor God with these big decisions, but sometimes the most God-honoring decision isn’t all that clear.

In this passage, Jesus tells us that if we are trustworthy with little, we can be trusted with much. Before you get wrapped up in the big decisions of life, be obedient in the small, everyday things. And actually, in this passage, Jesus is talking about being trustworthy with your money. He says that if you can use your earthly riches well, you can be trusted with “true” heavenly riches too.

What earthly riches has God entrusted to you today? You may feel like the typical “poor college student,” but most students and their families have more money than the rest of the world’s population. And even if you’re cash poor, you have a lot of time on your hands in college. How can you honor God with your money and your time in this season of your life? By honoring God with the little that you have been given now, you can be more prepared to honor God in the big decisions of life.

Take some time today to write out how you can honor Him in different areas of your life. Here are some options to consider:

- Give 10 percent of what you earn or receive as gifts to the church you attend.
- Exercise, sleep, and drink some water to take care of the body God has given you.
- Schedule out a time of Scripture reading and prayer every day.
- Create better study habits to honor God in your school work.
- Volunteer at your church or get involved with a campus ministry.
- If you're overwhelmed or busy, create space to enjoy some solitude with God.
- Spend intentional time with a friend or roommate.

These smaller disciplines look a little different from person to person, but they're important for everyone. Be obedient to God with little, and you will be obedient with much.

## Trying Out Sin?

By Joseph Breckenridge

*Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. – Proverbs 4:14-15 (NIV)*

College is a time of newfound freedom for most students. Even if you come from a home where your parents were lenient, this is likely the first time that you have experienced this level of freedom. You don't have a curfew, Mom and Dad are not there to make sure that you are obeying the rules, and nobody is going to make you do your homework. While this freedom is a great thing, and a necessary part of becoming an adult, many times it can go to your head and cause you to think that you are totally free from consequences.

Proverbs 4:14-19 warns of the dangers of experimenting with sin by comparing our actions to a path that will determine the direction we head in life. The writer warns us not to enter the path of the wicked. "Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way." We are told not to take even a step on the path of the wicked, that we should not even experiment with sin.

The author does not tell us this to keep us away from anything fun or deny us a good time; he writes this because he knows the true nature of sin: it is destructive and addictive. He compares it to an insatiable and damaging hunger. "They cannot rest until they do evil [indulged in their sin]. . . . They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence" (vv. 16-17).

Of course, the loss of sleep isn't an automatic sign of sin and it's definitely not the worst consequence. You may sleep very well without any sort of guilt because you are telling yourself that it was just an experiment—it's not a big deal. However, your experiment will likely continue to lead you down the path of destruction, which the author tells us is covered by darkness and causes those who are following it to stumble.

Sin is not something harmless you can test out. It always causes damage, not least of which is to you. As Adam and Eve learned in the garden, even a small taste can lead to disastrous results. Let us instead follow Christ down the path of righteousness, illuminated by His Word, so that we can see the path in front of us. After all, true freedom is found as a servant (Paul would say "slave") of Christ.



## Jesus Served

By Joseph Breckenridge

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Mark 10:45*

**M**any of us strive to make our own name known, especially when we enter new places and are meeting new people. This could be at the start of your college career or a new semester. We want to impress our teachers, friends, and classmates with our abilities, the amazing trip we took over the summer, or (as many Christians are tempted) with the way we served.

Serving is a very important part of the Christian life. We have the greatest example of a true servant in Christ. The only man who truly deserves to be served came to earth instead to serve the undeserving. In the ultimate form of servanthood and sacrifice, He died on the cross, so that we would be reconciled to Him.

He commands us to be servants as well. Lucky for us, there is never a shortage of ways to serve if we're willing to see. There are always people who need help: an elderly couple who needs some yard work done, someone in a nursing home who just needs a kind visitor to talk to, or a younger kid who needs help learning to read or needs someone to hang out with. Being actively involved in a local church will also open several doors for servanthood.

Christ calls us not only to serve but to serve with a particular attitude. While Jesus was serving, He did not brag about it or draw attention to Himself or the work that He was doing. And although serving is something Christians can often turn into a badge of honor, in Jesus' day, the call was to a low position. They were not proud, but worked quietly. They served for the sake of others rather than for their own recognition.

Christ does tell us that to be great you must be a servant, but we must make sure that we are using His definition of *great* and not our own. We need to make His name known and not our own. We are greatest when we are bringing Him glory. I challenge you to find a way to be a selfless servant wherever you are. If you do not have the desire to serve, I challenge you to pray for that desire. By serving, we become more like Christ, which is so much greater than having our own name known.

## Out of the Ordinary

By James Taylor

*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

– 1 Peter 2:11-12

I know there are some people who want to stand out and be different. But not me. I've always been happy to fit in with the crowd. I remember particularly a moment in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade when this weakness got the best of me. I had moved to Arkansas from Virginia, and the night before my first day at a new school, I was stressed out with this one huge question: Do people in Arkansas roll the bottoms of their jeans?

I know it's silly now, but back then it seemed like a huge deal. We "tight rolled" our jeans in Virginia, but I was clueless about the latest Arkansas trends. Of course, I didn't really care about what was stylish—I just wanted to fit in and not be the strange new kid. I won't tell you how that first day went, but I will say it wasn't long before I owned my first pair of cowboy boots.

When Peter writes to first-century Christians in this passage, he calls them "sojourners and exiles." The NASB translates it as "aliens and strangers." Peter is reminding them that they don't quite fit into the world around them, and it's not their true home. Jesus even said something like it when He told the disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own" (John 15:18-19, NIV).

Some of us have grown up in environments where it would be strange if someone *wasn't* a Christian, at least in name. While it's great that there are parts of the world where many have followed Christ, it can give us a false confidence about how we fit into the world. But if you follow Jesus, there will be times when the world will look at you as strange. And you'll probably be asked at some point, "Wait, you actually believe *that*?"

You may be getting those looks and questions now. They may come at your first job out of college. You may get them from your family if your faith doesn't match theirs. But they will come eventually.

Rather than being surprised or shamed into silence, find gracious confidence that as a Christian you have joined a long line of "strangers," going back to Jesus and even before Him (imagine the looks that John the Baptist got).

The point is not that we try to be as strange as possible, but that some of the world will always see us that way no matter how hard we try to fit in. Begin now to think about how you can live as a stranger in this world so that people will seek God because of your life. And be ready, as Peter writes later in this letter, "to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

## Grace in Weakness

By David Willhite

*But [the Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

**P**aul was certainly blessed with both steady faith and an understanding of the Christian life. However, he was still troubled by a hardship of his own; one which he had prayed for God to take away. While Paul did not receive the answer that he desired, he received the answer that he needed. Christ said: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” In a letter from Paul to the church in Corinth, a church so affected by false teachers that they were demanding proof of Paul’s apostleship, he shared his experience:

[The Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” . . . That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, NIV)

Paul knew firsthand what it looked like to suffer for Christ. Not only had he been rejected by the church he planted, he had also been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and would later be killed. Yet, Paul took delight in his weaknesses because he knew that they weren’t without reward. For Paul, two things happened when trials came his way, both an inward and an outward aspect. God used Paul’s weaknesses and deep hardships as a time to further shape him to the image of Christ. Paul’s “thorn” in his side was a constant reminder for him to have faith in God and not rely on himself.

This is true of us too. In tragedy and hardship we are humbled and reminded of our deep need for God and our insufficient power to do life on our own. Outwardly, God’s power is shown through us when we are weak. It was not Paul’s visions and teachings that he boasted in as his credentials to teach the church in Corinth. Rather, it was Paul’s weaknesses that proved his apostleship,

as God's power perfected what Paul could not do on his own. In the same way, we can rejoice in our hardships because of the work Christ is doing in us and the power Christ shows the world through us.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.  
(James 1:2-4, NIV)

## Let's Sing

By Scott Hartley

*Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. – Psalm 95:1-3*

**N**otice the *joyful noise* mentioned in verses 1 and 2. For what reason(s) should we who come to sing praises do it joyfully? What if no matter how hard we tried, we just couldn't make a joyful noise?

I want to pause and tell you a story of an awesome friend of mine who lives in East Asia. We'll call this dude Eddie. Wanting to begin my newest adventure with a bang (after a good prayer time with some new friends), I sought to connect with God in the reading of His Word, with prayer and in songs of praise. As I began to worship, Eddie began shouting the words of Isaiah and singing songs in his national language, bringing my legalistic "quiet time" to a sudden halt. I'd never seen anything like it before. I almost thought he was faking it. "How prideful of him," I thought at the time, but how wrong I was at judging him in that way.

I got to form a solid relationship with Eddie over six whole months and beautifully saw how much God truly meant to his life. He lived to know God more and extol His name for His salvation, His grace, and the glory He wholly deserves! That is exactly what the psalmist is doing in Psalm 95. He is praising the Lord for His saving power (v. 1), His greatness (v. 3), His kingship (v. 3), His sovereignty (vv. 4-5), and His creation (v. 5). He does it joyfully knowing there was nothing he could do about his salvation and that all credit belongs to God alone (as we also see in verses like Jonah 2:9 and Romans 3:11-12).

What makes a joyful noise to the Lord is how joyful our souls are for His grace in our lives, not necessarily whether or not we can sing beautifully or not. Eddie couldn't sing "well" but his soul did everything it could to praise the Savior of his rebellious soul. God is jealous for His own praise, and rightfully so. I think John Piper puts it best when he says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him" (*Desiring God*). Every time you sing, sing for joy and to the Lord, not to make yourself look good or feel better. Praise Him because of Him!

## With You Always

By James Taylor

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:18-20*

One of the most common questions on a college campus is “Who else is going?” Whether it’s about a party, a road trip, a movie, or a quick run for unhealthy food, most students want to know who’s already “in.” It can be the so-called “Fear of Missing Out” or an honest desire to be with friends that causes the question to be asked. But it illustrates the reality that we don’t just care about where we’re going—we care about who we’re going with. And I’m not just talking about peer pressure—I’ve often gone to lunch not because I wanted to eat out but because I cared about my relationships with the people who were going.

I love the significance of how Matthew closes his gospel, with Jesus saying, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Personal companionship. Forever. Wherever. No limits.

This passage is often called “The Great Commission” by Christians, and, as in Acts 1:8, it stands as a summary of Jesus’ final words before He ascends to the Father and the Spirit is sent. It’s a great verse that helps motivate ministries, churches, and mission trips. But I wonder if it has too often been pigeon-holed as a verse for missionaries and trips. Perhaps we’re missing something when we think that you have to travel to obey it.

The emphasis of the command in verse 18 is on the making of disciples, not just the “going.” It is assumed that disciples will be going, some traveling to new cities and some who will be “going” around Jerusalem. The church certainly sent people on trips to proclaim the good news about Jesus, but not every New Testament believer traveled like Paul did.

The point is that we don't need to wait until we go somewhere else to make disciples. We are called to do that wherever we are. And here's where we come back around to the promise connected with the command—Jesus says that He'll be with us wherever that is. As you are “going”—to class, in the dorm, on trips, at church, studying abroad, as you work and volunteer—take comfort that Jesus is with you, calling you and empowering you to help others know Him more.



## **Contributors**

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## Resources

If you are looking for other devotional resources or helps in spiritual growth, we recommend these as a good place to start:

Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today's Language*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992.

Duvall, J. Scott. *Experiencing God's Story of Life and Hope: A Workbook for Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.

Foster, Richard J. and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Revised Edition: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*. New York: HarperOne, 2005.

Lewis, C.S. *A Year with C.S. Lewis*. New York: HarperOne, 2003.

McLeroy, Leigh. *The Sacred Ordinary*. Brenham, Texas: Lucid Books, 2010.

Moore, Beth. *Praying God's Word Day by Day*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2006.

Moore, Beth. *Whispers of Hope: 10 Weeks of Devotional Prayer*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2013.

Piper, John. *Don't Waste Your Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.



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# **R e f u g e**

*Student-led Worship Every Thursday Night*

## Fall 2015 Schedule

August 27 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	JPAC
September 3 <sup>rd</sup>	9pm	JPAC
September 10 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	JPAC
September 17 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
September 24 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
October 1 <sup>st</sup>	10pm	Village Circle (after Tunes)
October 8 <sup>th</sup>	Fall Break	
October 15 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
October 22 <sup>nd</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
October 29 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
November 5 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
November 12 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
November 19 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
November 26 <sup>th</sup>	Thanksgiving Break	
December 3 <sup>rd</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church
December 10 <sup>th</sup>	9pm	Second Baptist Church

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