Stand Firm Devotional
Office of Spiritual Formation
Spring 2017
Sometimes we think that we can gain authority by the people we know or the things we do. This is far from the truth. Spiritual authority is given by God because He sees the heart of a person. It is not something that is earned for good behavior. When King David was 15 years old, the prophet Samuel arrived at his home and asked his father Jesse to bring in his sons, because God had chosen one of them to be king. When Samuel saw David’s oldest brother Eliab, he thought he was the one because of the way he looked. Immediately the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

The word for authority in Greek is the word *exousia* which means “the right to use the power.” The prefix *ex* means “out of” and *ousia* means “essence or being.” When you put those two together authority means out of being, or relationship, comes our right to use power. The day that Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse’s sons, David was tending the sheep and wasn’t even called in by his father to attend the meeting with Samuel. It wasn’t until all seven brothers passed by the prophet Samuel that he asked if there were more sons. I Samuel 16:12-13 reads, “So he [Jesse] sent for him [David] and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.” 13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.”

Many people may look at your appearance and judge whether or not you have authority, but God is the one who decides, because He sees your heart. If you want spiritual authority nurture your relationship with the Lord. Look at verse 13 again, “… and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.” Authority flows out of relationship. David loved the Lord will all his heart.

**Sooner or later, your private life will become your public life.**

**Prayer:** Father, draw me to yourself in such a way that I give you my heart and trust you for the outcome of my life.
Embrace Your Time of Preparation
I Samuel 16:14-23
(by Wanda Walborn)

After Samuel anointed David, he went back to tending the sheep. It would be 15 more years before David would actually take the throne as king. In the meantime, he was faithful to the ordinary things that were right in front of him. He tended the sheep, worshiped the Lord and wrote music, soothed the king by playing his lyre and he did target practice with his slingshot. Only at God’s appointed time, will we be released into the next level of our anointing. We think that since God has called us to ministry or business or nursing or education that we will immediately be ready for that place. Not only is there still preparation in our hearts, but the place is not ready to receive us. We need to settle into the ordinary task of faithfully showing up in the everyday things and learn the lessons of today, rather than chomping at the bit and insisting that such menial tasks are not what God has for us. David wrote most of his songs during those years of “doing nothing” but watch sheep. He developed intimacy with the Lord in a very deep way during those years. He also honed his warrior skills by killing a lion and a bear with his bare hands when they were stealing one of his lambs. Most importantly, David was learning to listen to the Lord and enjoy His presence.

We live in an instant society where we are used to getting immediate feedback and results. Our relationship with the Lord doesn’t have a fast track option. It is in the ordinary things that God shows up and gives us Himself and we realize that is more important than anything else. Sometimes it takes a while to learn this, but we won’t be released to move forward until we get it. Life is full of mundane moments of faithfulness that only God sees. Embrace this time of preparation. You won’t regret it.

“... then your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
Matthew 6:4

Prayer: Father, I surrender to your timetable in my life. I do want you to hurry up, but I believe you know what is best. I don’t want to miss what you are trying to teach me, because I am trying to get somewhere else. I embrace this time of preparation by focusing on you. Please draw me.
One day David’s father asked him to take food to his brothers on the front lines of battle with the Philistines. As David approached the Philistine Goliath came out to make his usual derogatory remarks about Israel to taunt them into fighting him. They had been there for forty days and still had not fought. When David heard Goliath’s taunts, he volunteered to fight him. Such faith infuriated his brothers and they accused him of being conceited and having a wicked heart. (v.28) There lack of confidence didn’t deter David. David was taken to King Saul who also tried to tell David he didn’t have the skills to take on this giant. David then recounted to Saul what happened when a lion and bear came while he was tending his father’s sheep. He went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. David then declared that the Lord who rescued him from the lion and the bear would rescue him again from the hand of this Philistine. Saul then agreed to let him fight Goliath.

Saul then dressed David in his own tunic and put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. (v. 38-39) David fastened on Saul’s sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he wasn’t used to them. He turned to Saul and told him he could fight in this armor because he wasn’t used to them. David then took off all of Saul’s armor, grabbed his staff and put five smooth stones in his bag. With his slingshot in his hand, he approached the Philistine.

Don’t think you can fight the battles the Lord has for you in someone else’s armor. It won’t fit because you aren’t used to it. The specific skills you have are the way you are to fight the enemy. Singers and musicians need to sing and play their instruments. Artists need to paint. Authors need to write. Computer science people need to create codes and programs. Business people need to create jobs. No one can do the work that was uniquely meant by God for you to do. Put on your own custom-made armor and only fight the fights God has called you to fight.

Don’t die with the music still in you!

**Prayer:** Father, I have always felt that my gifts and talents are menial. I’m sorry for trying to wear someone else’s armor and I receive the way you have made me advance your kingdom.
When I was a child, my sister Linda and I used to argue constantly. My mother would tell us countless times to stop bickering, but nothing worked. At home we were always at each other’s throats, but at school, no one could say anything about Linda or I would be all over them. She was my sister and I would defend her no matter what.

When David arrived at the battlefield at the Valley of Elah, he was there to bring the items his father has asked him to carry to his brothers. He didn’t come to fight. Hearing Goliath’s taunts about his God stirred up something in David in which he couldn’t walk away. That Philistine was talking about his God! Love is what compelled David that day to volunteer to take on Goliath. It was his motivation to go against the odds and face this formidable opponent. Love is what motivated Jesus to come to earth and face the cross. Love is what will motivate us to fight the enemy of our soul and cut off his lies and attack against us. Love is stronger than death. The enemy tries to get you to hesitate, back off, give up, turn away, but you must allow the fiery passion for Jesus to rise up within you to fight for the one you love. Everything in the natural said that David would be killed in this battle, but he knew his God was able to empower him just like he had with the lion and the bear. Verse 48 reads, “As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.” David did not take a defensive stance and brace himself for the blow. He ran quickly toward his enemy using the weapons he had been practicing with for years!

His battle cry was, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give all of you into our hands.” That my friends is faith!

Many waters cannot quench the fire of love – Song of Songs 8:7

Prayer: Father, stir up my passion for you in such a way that I will run to the battle instead away from it!
When I was in college, my friend Kathy loved tennis. One August she went down to the US Open and met some rich kids whose parents had box seats at center court. She hung out with them for the day and asked if she could sit there again tomorrow even though they wouldn’t be there. They said she could. She came home that night so excited to bring me the next day. I didn’t really believe her that we would have such great seats, but she assured me that if I acted like I was supposed to be there and matter of factly gave the family name, I would get in. Sheepishly I agreed. As we entered the area, the man asked the name and Kathy clearly announced the family name, “Johnson.” The man stepped aside and let her in. I came next and he asked the family name. I took a deep breath, looked him in the eye and said, “Johnson” and he stepped aside. That day my friend and I sat at center court watching Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova play. All because I gave the right name to get in!

Romans 8 reads, 14 “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again, rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The benefit of being a child is that we have full rights and privileges as a son or daughter. All that the Father has now belongs to us too and we get to enjoy it all! We didn’t earn it or work hard for it. We were born into it and bear the very name of Christ – Christian. We are sons and daughters of the Most High God. Believe it! Receive it! Walk in it! Who you know matters!

*The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into the new Jerusalem... and only those who names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*

*Revelation 21:26-27*

*Prayer:* Father, thank you for adopting me as your child with all the rights and privileges that accompany bearing the family name!
Several famous songwriters have died young. Amy Winehouse, Tupac, Kurt Cobain, Notorious B.I.G., and Michael Jackson. Think of what music we might have today if they were still alive. What is more tragic than dying young, is living long and never letting the music out. Living long and not using the gifts you’ve been given. Living long and burying your talents in your passivity. Living long, but living safe and not taking the risks that are a natural part of advancing Kingdom of God. Living long, but not using the weapons you have uniquely been given!

Since our struggle is not against flesh and blood, the weapons we use must be weapons of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit are weapons to stand in the righteousness of God and to defeat the enemy of our soul. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Such weapons have divine power to demolish strongholds, arguments and every fake thing that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Taking our thoughts captive is also a weapon against Satan because he then has no access point to our mind to attack. Our obedience allows the power of God to flow through us in such ways that push back the darkness and advance the kingdom of God. The unique way in which God has created each person on Earth is meant to have a divine impact for the kingdom of God.

*No weapon formed against us shall prosper... Isaiah 54:17*

**Prayer:** Father, I stand in your righteousness as your beloved child and I will walk in the fullness of all that you have for me to do. I say yes to you in every area of my life!
The Mind is the Powerhouse of the Body
Proverbs 23:7
(by Shaniqua Freeman)

Sensory input is received via eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and fingers from external stimuli. Once the information is received, the mind is what processes the sensory information and tells the body how to respond. For example, when you touch a hot mug (external stimuli), the message is sent to the brain (information processing) and the brain tells the hand to remove itself from the hot mug (response). Thus, the brain is what receives, processes, and responds, to sensory input and the healthier the brain is the healthier the response to external factors.

The same is true for our spiritual mind. The mind receives information from our environment, genetics, beliefs, and core values and determines how we will respond in conversations, throughout trials and tests based on what it is filled with. If the mind is filled with salvation and scripture then your responses to pressing issues, concerns, test, and trials will be in alignment with the word of God. Where the mind goes, the body follows. Be selective about what enters your mind through your eyes and ears because it determines how you would live and respond. Ask the Lord to reveal what occupies your mind the most because it will reveal why you have been responding to situations and circumstances in ways that are displeasing to you.

“For as a man thinks within himself so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7)

Prayer: Father, I submit my mind to you and ask that you help me to be more alert about what I allow to enter to mind.
The Helmet is Our Protective Gear

Proverbs 23:7
(by Shaniqua Freeman)

A helmet is utilized to protect the head from any impending danger. The more dangerous the activity more the helmet protects the head, ears, and eyes. For example, when riding a bicycle, which is considered a low-level dangerous activity, a helmet protects the head, the forehead, and the top of the ears. However, when an individual is riding a motorcycle, which is considered a high-level dangerous activity, a helmet covers all of the head, forehead, eyes, and ears. Therefore, a helmet does not only protect the brain from impending danger but the eyes and ears as well.

The helmet of salvation, much like the motorcycle helmet, protects our minds, eyes, and ears because they are the gateways to our soul. The helmet of salvation must be placed on securely in order to effectively protect the mind, eyes and ears, from the schemes of our enemy, Satan. Spend some time in the presence of the Lord and ask him how can you further secure your helmet to ensure the lies of the enemy doesn’t prevail in your life. Listen to what the Holy Spirit reveals and apply to it to the rhythm of your life.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” Matthew 6:22-23

Prayer: Father, help me to guard my mind, eyes, and ears against the enemy of my soul who desires to sift me as wheat. Help me to lend the members of my body to the truth of your word, the prompting of your Spirit, and desires of your heart. Show me where I need to secure my helmet so my mind is protected at all times. I love you, Lord, help me to abide in your truth always and forever. Amen!
The Helmet of Salvation  
Ephesians 6:10-18  
(by Shaniqua Freeman)

The helmet of salvation is a piece of the armor of God that the Apostle Paul told the Ephesians to put on. The Apostle Paul insisted that they utilize this armor because it will help them “stand firm against the schemes of the devil”. The helmet of salvation is the 5th piece mentioned in Paul’s list of the armor, not because it is less valuable, but because it has to be partnered with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, in order to be effective. The helmet of salvation is for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and now have entered into battle with the evil one.

The helmet of salvation ensures that once a person is saved, they have a new identity and their old man was put to death on the cross with Christ and the penalty of their sins was eradicated through the shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross. Thus, you are no longer slaves to sin but joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Putting on the helmet of salvation ensures that the lies of the enemy will no longer cause us to doubt, fear, or worry because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Let the helmet of salvation extinguish the lies the enemy has been trying to torment you with, by accepting who you are in Christ due to salvation, and rejecting the characteristics, sin patterns, and lies that belong to the old man. Arise and receive your identity as a child of God who is now accepted, significant, and secure in Christ Jesus!

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, [he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 Corinthians 5:17.]*

*Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. Galatians 4:7*

**Prayer:** Father, reveal to me the lies I have been believing about myself and help me to replace them with the truth of your word. I declare today that I am not who I was yesterday. I am not my old man, but I am a new creature in Christ who has been set free from the bondage of sin. I declare I am not who the enemy says I am but I am a Child of God, a royal priesthood, and seated in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus. I am the head and not the tail and as you strengthen me I can do all things.
Satan has four goals that he is trying to execute in a variety of ways according to scripture. John 10:10 states that “the enemy comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy.” In this scripture, we see that Satan desires to steal from us, kill us, and/or destroy us. This passage isn’t speaking of stealing, killing, and destroying in the natural realm only, but it is also speaking about how the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy us the spiritual realm as well. Satan desires to sift us like wheat, but Jesus came that we may have an abundant life. Moreover, the fourth goal of the enemy is to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). We must put on our helmets of salvation in order to ensure that the enemy doesn’t succeed at accomplishing his four goals in our lives.

Every time we believe the lie of the enemy we take our helmet off. Every time we allow the enemy to come in and rob us of our joy we have forgotten what rightly belongs to us due to salvation and we’ve taken the helmet off. We must stop listening to the lies of the enemy, which are sent to deceive, steal, kill, and destroy, and believe the word of The Lord. Spend time in the Bible today to find out who God says you are and begin to declare those truths over your life because knowing the truth is the only way to ensure you will stop taking the helmet off.

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” – John 1:12

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” – John 10: 27-29.

Prayer: Father, show me who you created me to be and help me believe this truth. I declare that you are more powerful than the enemy and I choose to remain in the palm of your hand by believing your word, which is Truth. I refuse to take off the helmet of salvation and believe the lies of the enemy over your truth. Give me the boldness to stand in my new identity, that I may glorify you in it. I love you, Lord Jesus, and it is in your name I pray. Amen!
Throughout the Bible, scripture tells us that the mind is where the battle takes place in the lives of Christians. Jesus himself stated that “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” – Matthew 5:28. In this verse, Jesus is informing his readers that sin begins in the mind and heart before it is displayed in action. We have to guard our minds against all pretensions, imaginations, and thoughts that the enemy will try to plant in our mind to make us stumble.

Keeping on the helmet of salvation ensures that we won’t lend our minds to sin because it will be filled with the truth. Thus, our minds need to be filled with truth in order to see the schemes of the enemy and take them into captivity. At times our thoughts are not our own. If these thoughts are vain, envious, slanderous, and the like, take them captive and cast them into the obedience of Jesus Christ.

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” – 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Prayer: Father, I come today taking every thought that is contrary to your truth captive and casting it into the obedience of Christ. I ask that you will align my mind with your truth. I also ask that you would give me insight on how to remain focused on the things that are lovely and pure. I want my mind to be full of your word. Teach me how to fight so I won’t lend my mind to the agenda of the enemy. Thank you for your faithfulness. I pray this prayer today in Jesus’ name.
When people enlist in the military, they do so because they believe that the country is worth fighting for. These individuals must endure vigorous training and at times harsh judgments and statements. However, they never stop preparing for battle because they believe that the prize of the battle is worth fighting for.

We as Christians must be the same way. We understand that the mind is the battlefield and we can’t stop fighting. The prize of the war is freedom here on earth and eternal life in the life to come. We must continuously believe that the prize of winning the battle in the mind is worth fighting for. We must stay dedicated and committed to training to win the battle despite distractions. Stay focused. Stay alert. Stand firm. Keep fighting because the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is worth fighting for.

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” – Philippians 3:14.

Prayer: Father, empower me to continue to stand and fight the battle in my mind. The prize of this battle is worth fighting for. I ask where I am weak, that you would be my strength. I declare today that when I have done all I can to do stand, I will stand firm again. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen!
Growing up, I always had a fear of conflict. I hated being at odds with others. Conflict often gave me an overwhelming feeling of anxiousness. My solution to conflict was to distance myself from the person(s) involved and maintain a false sense of peace. This false sense of peace imprisoned me to a psychological minefield. I often had to combat this false sense of peace by finding things outside of God to distract me from the true problem. When you are living with a false sense of peace, you have chosen to live under a lie that eventually becomes your truth.

The truth is, false peace is no peace at all. False peace is a counterfeit currency that provides fictitious hope. True peace is not found in ignoring or running away from the issue. True peace is found as we soak in the truth of who we are in Christ and take on his likeness to confront our challenges before us. Our peace is linked to our identity in Christ. When I am secure about my identity in Christ I can begin to act out what is within me. When I realize that my anxiousness chases away the presence of God in my life, I am more motivated to surrender my fears to the Lord in exchange for His peace.

As conflict comes, I can remember that Jesus, the One who has the authority to command the winds and the waves has the same authority and power to calm the storms in me and around me. The only requirement is that I surrender to Him.

_Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus._ – Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

**Prayer:** Father, I don’t always put my faith in you when storms come into my life. Please forgive me and help me to not allow the circumstances to cloud my mind and cause me to forget about you. Jesus, I ask you to be the captain of my soul.
There is nothing more liberating than the truth. The truth compels us to come out of hiding and beckons us to be who we really are before God and others. The truth commands us to walk in the light. The truth reveals that God accepts the good, the bad, and the ugly in us and that He still loves us with our flaws. We’ve often heard the words of Jesus “the truth will set you free.” But, what exactly has Jesus come to set us free from? Jesus came to set us free from the lies that have enslaved us. Jesus came to set us free from the fears that bind us. Jesus came to set us free from the words that others have used to break us. Jesus came to set us free from the traps that were set up by the enemy of our souls to destroy us. Jesus came to set the captives free!

Sometimes our greatest opposition does not come from the outside, it comes from within us. It’s what we believe about ourselves, it’s what we tell ourselves, it’s the lies within ourselves that we remain loyal to. What we believe as truth is what we live out and many of us live out of our false self; we live out of an impostor.

If you’ve ever seen the film The Great Debaters there is a heated debate between Mr. Tolson (Denzel Washington) and the Henry Lowe (Nate Parker), a student. The debate goes as follows: Melvin B. Tolson: Anybody know who Willie Lynch was? Anybody? Raise your hand. No one? He was a vicious slave owner in the West Indies. The slave-masters in the colony of Virginia were having trouble controlling their slaves, so they sent for Mr. Lynch to teach them his methods. The word "lynching" came from his last name. His methods were very simple, but they were diabolical. Keep the slave physically strong, but psychologically weak and dependent on the slave master. Keep the body, take the mind. Mr. Tolson then delivers the famous line, “I am here to help you to find, take back, and keep your righteous mind.”

As I think about what Mr. Tolson was seeking to do, I’m reminded of what Jesus already did. He came to set the captives free. He placed upon us His righteousness. And because of that I’m no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God. That’s walking in freedom! That’s walking in peace! Only by holding onto to the truth can we find the freedom we seek.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:31-32 (NIV)

Prayer: Father, I ask you to reveal the lies that I have come to believe as truth in my life. Help me to break free from them. Renew my mind and help me to hold onto the truth of Your Word.
“When we embrace the principle that God wants us to live out of His delegated authority - an authority recovered by Jesus and passed on to us - we will live with a greater sense of God’s security in the mysteries of life. This is the authority of the believer!” – Dr. Chuck Davis *The Bold Christian*. When I think about this quote, I am compelled to ask the question, how much further would the Kingdom of God be advanced if the people of God were all walking in spiritual authority?

When I was a teenager there was a popular rap song called Survival of the Fittest. The lyrics of that song stated “There’s a war going on outside no man is safe from.” As a Christian, those words mean so much more to me now. Only, it’s not a war on the streets, it’s a war in the spiritual realm. Unless we put on the armor of God as followers of Christ, we are not safe from the attacks of the enemy of our soul.

As a follower of Christ, I cannot run away from spiritual warfare. I can expect to be attacked for following Christ. Peace is not the absence of attacks from the enemy of my soul. Peace is knowing that even as my soul is being attacked, I can stand firm because of the authority given to me by the One who is in control.

Without grabbing hold of the spiritual authority delegated to us by Jesus we are nothing more than moving targets for the enemy. Without spiritual authority, we cannot experience true peace. It’s hard to demand justice in this world without authority. It’s hard to have peace in this world without authority. It’s hard to bring life change to others without authority. Take hold of the authority given to you today!

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. *Isaiah 41:10* (NIV)

Prayer: Father, help me to take hold of the spiritual authority you have given to me. Remind who I am to you and that I am not helpless when I am under attack.
It very easy for us to praise God when everything seems to be going right in our lives. When our relationships are flourishing, our finances are in order, our health is satisfactory, our jobs are secure, and we are thriving in our relationship with God we all can praise God with no hesitation. When things are going good, it’s not difficult for us to say I will always sing Your praise.

But, what happens when things go wrong? Will His praise still forever be on our lips?

Years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asserted, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy.” I think about this quote often. It speaks to the character of who we are. It compels me to ask whether I love the Father for who He is or do I simply love Him because of what He does? This quote also forces me to think back on the popular phrase I heard in church growing up which says, “God is good all the time and all the time God is good.”

People often make the mistake of connecting the person of God to their circumstances in life. In times of adversity, we can remember that God’s goodness is not linked to whether things are going right or wrong in our lives. God’s character is impeccable. He is always good, but life isn’t always good. What we do have is the promise that God is always with us and because of that it is possible for us to always sing His praise.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. Psalm 34:1 (ESV)

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)

Prayer: Father, I haven’t always had the right attitude when there are things in my life that are beyond my control. Help me to remember that your goodness in not based on my circumstances and that your character never changes. Whether I am in a good or bad situation, teach me to focus on you and not my problem.
Have you ever reached the point of being sick and tired of being sick and tired? The frustration builds, you are on edge, and at this stage you just can’t take anymore? You realize that something must change and that you cannot be passive if you desire a different outcome. Albert Einstein once defined insanity as “doing same thing over and over again expecting a different result.” Perhaps, you’ve tried to do things your way for some time and it hasn’t worked. Perhaps it’s time for you to break the wheel.

Running around the same wheel drains the passion out of life. Redundancy is the medication of the walking dead. Our walk with God was never meant to feel like a reoccurring ritual. In Christ, we are supposed to experience life abundantly, which means we were not meant to live on a wheel. We often get trapped on a wheel when we feel we cannot break away from our circumstances or expectations that others have placed on us. But remember, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Remember that in Christ you are free to run and that you are free to live. Wheels were meant for hamsters, not God’s children. You were made alive with Christ, so walk with Him today knowing that he has given you the authority to break the wheel.

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus... Ephesians 2:4-6 (NIV)*

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to live in the freedom that you have granted to me. Give me the courage and strength to stand firm.
Who Is My Neighbor
Luke 10:29
(by Nathaniel Perez)

Perhaps one of the most common obstacles that college students face is the idea of living in community with others. When you enroll as a freshman, you may be given the opportunity to room with someone you know. But often, we don’t know anyone on campus to even choose. On the first day you arrive everyone you meet is a stranger, but soon you are comfortable with these acquaintances and the next thing you know they are close friends. In life, we don’t often get the opportunity to pre-select our neighbors. Neighbors are somewhat presented to us. And sometimes relationships between neighbors can sour and become contentious and you can develop a strong dislike for one another.

Living with others in community can sometimes be difficult. Living with others in community can also be beneficial, because community forces you to come out of your comfort zone and grow. Community teaches us to break away from our self-serving nature. Sometimes in community our neighbors don’t look like us, talk like, act like us, and most of the time they are just completely different from us. Someone being different should not push us to a place of being dismissive.

Julie Park, the author of When Diversity Drops states, “Universities are training grounds for our country’s future leaders to understand how to interact across difference, and engaging with racial diversity during the college years is associated with numerous educational, civic, and developmental benefits, such as academic and cognitive skills; leadership and teamwork skills; prejudice reduction; social agency and civic development. Thus, to support our diverse society, college students need experience living and learning in racially diverse communities.”

Are you using your college experience as a training ground to become a better neighbor? Don’t always look for the easy way out when you can’t find common ground with someone. As a Christian, the cross is a common ground where we can find peace.

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Luke 10:29 (NIV)

Prayer: Father, help me to see that the image of God is in everyone that I encounter. I am a minister of reconciliation. Guide me in learning how to be a peacemaker.
Faith through Seeking  
Genesis 5:21-24 & Hebrews 11:5-6  
(by Heather Garcia)

Enoch is a fascinating person. When we look at his life in Genesis it says, “Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years.” Sometimes it’s challenging to walk faithfully with God for a single day, and he did it for 300 years! I imagine him waking up every day and going through the battle to decide whether or not he would make it to today’s meeting. Questioning, would God show up? What if he doesn’t? Going through a battle in his mind and his will, and then making the choice, every day for 300 years to seek the Lord and to meet with Him.

Hebrews 11:5-6 says, “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: ‘He could not be found, because God had taken him away.’ For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Enoch’s faith shielded him from the experience of death! He “walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Genesis 5:24). Sometimes we step out from behind our shield simply because we choose something else over seeking the Lord. What does earnestly seeking God look like in your life? How can you arrange your life in such a way that it can be said of you, he/she walked faithfully with God?

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Prayer: Father, I confess that I believe you exist, but I don’t always order my life in such a way that I walk with you and earnestly seek you. Today I choose to come to you, to seek you, to listen to you, and to walk with you.
Noah lived in a time of incredible wickedness. People were wicked to the point that the Lord decided to destroy everyone. There was no one who encouraged Noah to listen to God, let alone believe Him. Yet, the Lord saw something in Noah as He looked over the earth, and gave him the opportunity to save himself, his family, and “two of all living creatures” (Genesis 6:9). The Lord told him what he was going to do and exactly what to do, and “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). Again, when it was time for the flood to begin, “Noah did all that the Lord commanded him” (Genesis 7:5).

Hebrews 11:7a says, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear build an ark to save his family.” In a time where no one was listening to God, Noah was listening. In a time when no one obeyed God, Noah obeyed. His faith was a shield that saved him and his family from total destruction. When we walk in obedience to the Lord, we walk behind a shield of faith, which has farther-reaching implications than we realize. How can your friends, family, and the creatures of the earth be blessed today by your choice to be obedient?

Noah did everything just as God commanded him. Genesis 6:22

Prayer: Father, I confess that I often want to do my own thing and go my own way. Sometimes I think I know what is best for me and I choose not to listen to you. Today I choose to listen to you. I believe that you are good and you know what is best for me and for others. I choose to believe what you say, and obey you.
Abraham waited and believed that he would receive his promised son through Sarah for YEARS before he saw it happen. Finally, he has his precious son Isaac, and the Lord tells him to sacrifice his son. First, this sounds crazy! Why would God ask Abraham to do that? It doesn’t make sense! Additionally, how could God ask Abraham to give back the very thing he promised? Again, why would He do that? These are questions I imagine Abraham deeply struggled with as he set out on his three-day journey to obey God by sacrificing the son he so dearly loved.

I imagine as he told his servants to wait and moved on with Isaac to the sacrifice site, that he started recounting the ways that the Promise Maker was also a Promise Keeper. How He had been faithful at every turn, and even though it ripped out his heart to think of sacrificing his son, faith began to arise in him, assuring him that God would come through. Hebrews 11:17-19 says, “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.”

Abraham believed God to the point of sacrificing the very promise that was given to him by God. This act of faith provided a shield for the fulfillment of the promise of God for himself and his descendants. What are you holding on to? Are you holding to it more tightly than you’re holding to Him? What has the Lord called you to sacrifice?

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Genesis 22:8a

Prayer: Father, I confess that I sometimes I hold on to your promises, relationships, or things even more than I hold on to you. I let go of everything I’m holding so my hands are free to hold Yours. Even if I never get to see the fulfillment of all you have promised me, I choose to trust you and believe you to bring it to life.
Rahab believed God before she even knew Him. In Joshua 2:8-11 she spoke to the Hebrew spies and said, “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below.”

She had heard of all He had done to deliver His people from Egypt and she knew her whole town was afraid. Instead of accepting certain death, she chose to take a huge risk and hide the Hebrew spies. Once she had misdirected those who were looking to catch the spies and kill them, she went to the spies and asked them to show kindness to her and her family but saving them from death. The spies responded in Joshua 2:14, “Our lives for your lives!’ the men assured her. ‘If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.” By taking this risk, Rahab’s destiny was changed. She went from being a prostitute in a city that was destroyed, to being in the lineage of Christ. Rahab’s faith not only shielded her life and her family’s life but it also grafted her into the family of God. Is the Lord asking you to take a risk? What leap of faith can you take today that could change your destiny?

“For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

*Joshua 2:11b*

**Prayer:** Father, I confess that there are times that I avoid risk. I choose to believe what I see in front of me rather than believing that You are bigger and stronger than everything I see. Today I choose to believe You and take the risk You’ve placed in front of me!
David was on the run. His leader wanted to kill him, and had even tried to kill him! This is a situation where it would seem David had every right to fight back. He was a warrior, it was in his DNA to fight! Additionally, he was already anointed to be the next king, and if the current king is bad and trying to kill him, why not just take the kingdom that was already promised to him by force and free the people from a king who had gone crazy? That’s even what David’s friends thought as they encouraged him to take Saul’s life, not once, but twice. While on the run from Saul, David encountered a very vulnerable Saul twice and had the opportunity to take his life, but instead chose faith.

In 1 Samuel 26, David’s friend Abishai believed that the Lord had delivered Saul into David’s hands, however, David, responded in 1 Samuel 26:9-11a by saying, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives,’ he said, ‘the Lord himself with strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed.” David believed that the Lord who called him to be king was the Lord who would give him the kingdom in His way and in His timing. He chose to honor God and his king by saving Saul’s life rather than taking it, even when it was extremely difficult. He entrusted his life, and Saul’s life, completely to the Lord.

Both times, when Saul learned that David spared his life, he saw David’s heart toward him, abandoned his pursuit to kill him, and returned home. David’s life, call and kingdom were shielded by his choice to honor authority. Who has authority over you? How are you choosing to honor those in authority?

**But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed. 1 Samuel 26:11a**

**Prayer:** Father, I confess that I struggle to follow my leaders. I haven’t trusted that you know what you’re doing and that you’ll call them into account if they don’t properly lead me. Today, I choose to trust you and to honor those in authority over me. I believe that you are faithful to bring my life and call to fruition and I submit to the way you desire use those in authority to shape me into the person you made me to be.
Mary was going along her merry way. She was planning to marry a godly man and suddenly a visit from an angel changes everything. As the angel Gabriel greets her, he calls her highly favored, which perplexed Mary, but also perplexes me because God’s favor looks different than we often expect. In Luke 1:30-33 Gabriel proceeds to tell Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever, his kingdom will never end.”

On the surface, this sounds like amazing news!! Who wouldn’t want to be the mother of the promised Messiah? However, in reality, this meant explaining a pregnancy to her fiancée and dealing with the judgment and skepticism of everyone who didn’t believe that the Holy Spirit impregnated her. Even in light of that, her response in Luke 1:38 was, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” Even though she couldn’t have possibly understood all this would entail and the gravity of that statement, she surrendered herself entirely to the Lord and by her faith, the Savior of the world was born. Her surrender was a shield she could stand behind every time it hurt to be the mother of the King, when Joseph was planning to quietly divorce her, when people didn’t believe the truth, and especially when she had to watch Him die on a cross. We benefit from Mary’s surrender even today. What is the Lord calling you to surrender? What difficult or possibly painful path is he inviting you to walk with him? May your answer be like Mary’s.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. Luke 1:38

Prayer: Father, I confess that there are areas of my life that I have resisted surrendering to you entirely. I have been afraid of the cost. Today I choose to surrender to you entirely. I trust you and I will follow you no matter the cost.
Truth #1—You are forgiven
Ephesians 1:7
(by Emmanuel Jean-Pierre)

What if you woke up tomorrow and found out you had powers? Imagine you go to the hospital and the nurse takes a blood sample and comes back and tells you, “You have Kryptonian DNA. You’re related to Superman.” Aside from having to now figure out when Superman became real, how would you react to knowing that you have the same DNA that Superman has? What would this mean? It would mean that everything Superman could do, you could do. The only thing you need now is to test out your powers. But you would never test them out if you didn’t actually believe you had them. What if I told you that you have something even greater than Kryptonian DNA in your blood?

In this devotional, you’ll find 6 truths about who you are in Christ. The same way that finding out you have Superman’s DNA would radically change your life, my hope is that finding out these 6 truths about yourself will radically change the way you live.

Chances are you already believe the opposite of these truths and it’s been shaping the way you live your life. All I ask of you is to do two things when you read through this. First, believe that these truths are true about you, whether you feel like they’re true or not. Secondly, once you suspend your doubt and believe that they’re true, go out and act like they’re true. Do something that someone who actually was like this would do. So if one truth is, “You are the greatest dancer in the world” (which isn’t one of them, by the way), then your homework would be to challenge someone to a dance off today. Get the point? Believe who you are and act like who you are.

No matter what you’ve done in your past, God has forgiven it and wiped it off your record. You don’t have to live with that guilt anymore. If your past was an F, God dropped that exam and it has no effect on your GPA. You don’t have to keep punishing yourself for it. You’re forgiven. This is who you are.

Homework #1: What would a forgiven person do today? How would they treat themselves? Would they beat themselves up or encourage themselves? How would they treat other people today? Would they hold a grudge against someone or forgive them? Figure it out and go and do that today. Believe who you are and act like who you are.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” Ephesians 1:7

Prayer: Lord, I know that You’ve forgiven me and I choose to believe that I’m forgiven. Today I choose to forgive myself and others the way You’ve forgiven me.
Truth #2—You are Holy
Ephesians 1:4
(by Emmanuel Jean-Pierre)

Usually when we think of holiness, we think of being perfect and following the rules so smoothly that we’re morally superior to everyone around us. But this isn’t what the Bible means when it talks about holiness. As a matter of fact, moral behavior is just a by-product of being holy. The words for holy in the Old and New Testaments literally mean “set apart”. God is holy because He is completely and wholly other than everything else that exists, so when Paul says that you’re holy, he’s not saying that you’re better than everyone. He’s saying that you’re different. You are not like the rest of the world. Like Superman compared to a normal human, you are different on a fundamental level. And because you’re entirely different from the rest of the world, that’s what empowers you to live a life that’s different from the rest of the world. It’s because you’re already holy that you have the power to resist sin and exercise self-control.

Because you’re holy, you have the power to overcome your selfishness and love others in ways you could never love before. So when God gives us commandments like “love your enemies” or “flee from sexual immorality”, it’s like someone telling Superman to fly. It’s not because He wants to give us rules to follow. It’s because He knows He’s given us the power to do these things.

All in all, because we’re holy, we can’t make excuses that temptation is too hard to resist or that we’re not good enough for God’s calling. We don’t have the luxury anymore of saying, “I couldn’t help it...my flesh is too strong...” Complaining that we can’t say no to sin might be as ridiculous as Superman saying, “I can’t fight that burglar.” And us saying we’re not “good enough” to do what God’s called us to makes as much sense as Superman saying, “That building’s too high.”

Homework #2: What would a holy person do today? Would they give in to peer pressure to sin or walk away? Would they shy away from God’s calling or walk straight into it? Believe who you are and act like who you are.

“...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” Ephesians 1:4

Prayer: Thank you for making me holy. Today I choose to live out my holiness by resisting temptation and doing what You ask me to do.
One of the most ubiquitous lies we get fed on a daily basis is “you’re not enough.” Whether it’s the swimsuit model telling you that you’re not curvy enough, the body builder telling you that you’re not big enough, the valedictorian sitting next to you in class telling you that you’re not smart enough, or the kid who's memorized the entire Bible telling you that you’re not holy enough. We get this message explicitly and implicitly every day and it’s easy to go through life with our heads hanging low thinking that we really are “not enough.”

But the truth is that you are enough. You may not be the best singer on campus, the smartest kid in class, and you may never run a Fortune 500 company. But God has made you unique and no one can be better at being you than you. Not only that, but all the characteristics that you envy in other people so much like courage, wisdom, confidence, joy, love, and anything else you can name, are all things that Jesus has. And the Bible says that when you become a Christian, Jesus is now living in you. So now you have those same qualities inside of you too. All that you have to do is start using them. You already have everything you need to succeed in life. Your walk with Christ is about God creating circumstances where those things get brought out of you.

**Homework #3:** What would a person who is enough do today? What are some things you’ve been doing or not doing because you feel that you’re not enough? Have you turned down an offer to sing? Avoided a class because you thought you weren’t smart enough? Said no to a date because you thought you weren’t good enough? Whatever you normally do because you don’t think you’re enough, do the opposite today. **Believe who you are and act like who you are.**

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Colossians 2:9-10

**Prayer:** Lord, I believe that You’ve made me enough and given me everything I need to be who You made me to be. Today, I choose to live out of my confidence in You and not out of my fear of being inadequate.
I love movies. But I usually stay away from one particular kind of movie—scary movies. I’m fine with being scared in the theater, but when a movie is specifically about the demonic, I usually stay away. The reason isn’t that I’m afraid of the movies themselves or that I’m afraid that a demon will pop out the screen and possess me. The real reason is that it creates unnecessary fear in me. Movies like Insidious and The Conjuring feed off our fear of the demonic and amp it up until we leave the theater horrified of anything vaguely supernatural. They’re directed by people who are powerless over the demonic and make us feel like we’re also powerless over the demonic and that if we’re not careful, we’re going to end up tortured and possessed just like the people in this movie.

But the truth is that the Enemy has no power over us. When you’re in Christ, you’re protected from the Enemy and evil spirits. Granted, you can open a door if you go looking for things by playing with ouija boards and doing witchcraft. My mother had a saying, “What God gives you and what you go looking for are two different things.” God will protect you, but that doesn’t mean you should be stupid and go play with Satan’s toys. At the end of the day, you don’t have to be afraid of the Enemy tormenting you.

Homework #4: What would someone who’s protected by God do today? Have you been sleeping with the lights on because you think there’s a demon in your room? Have you been avoiding a missions trip opportunity because you think it’s too dangerous? Believe who you are and act like who you are.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” 1 John 5:18

Prayer: Lord, I believe that You watch over me and protect me. Today, I pray that You’d deliver me from any evil that comes my way.
Truth #5—You Are Brave
2 Timothy 1:7
(by Emmanuel Jean-Pierre)

For those of you who know me, you know that I do parkour. For those of you who don’t know what parkour is, it’s the art of moving from one place to the next in the most efficient way possible. Oftentimes the most efficient way involves running up walls, climbing railings, and jumping off roofs. Whenever people see me do a stunt, they usually say the same 2 things: “How do you do that?” And… “I could never do that.”

People see parkour and think it’s scary and run away. But I learned from one “freerunner” that fear is just your body’s way of telling you that risk is involved. It’s just a reminder that says, “Hey, if you do this wrong, you can get seriously hurt.” Most people respond to that by saying, “Okay. I’m not gonna do it.” But the correct response is, “Thanks. I’m gonna make sure I do it right.”

God will ask you to do something scary and you’ll be afraid. That’s just your mind telling you that there’s risk involved. All you have to do is tell your mind, “I know. So I’m gonna make sure I do it right. But I’m gonna do it.”

People also see parkour and think they can’t do it. The truth is that anyone who can walk can do parkour. Because at its core, parkour simply takes movements your body naturally does and applies it to different environments. As hard as it is to believe, your body was designed to move the way it does in parkour—all parkour is doing is awakening that. In the same way, you were designed to do the scary things God asks you to. Some of you are afraid of doing the very thing God created you to do because you don’t realize the power that He’s put inside of you. You’ve spent so much of your life running away that you’ve forgotten how to be brave. Your Christian life is, in a sense, God constantly reminding you how brave He’s made you.

Homework #5: What would you do today if you were ten times braver than you are now? What is one thing you’ve wanted to do, or know God has called you to do, but you’ve been too afraid to do? Believe who you are and act like who you are.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7

Prayer: Lord, I believe that You’ve made me brave. Show me what You want me to do today and I choose to do it and not be afraid.
I think this is one of the scariest verses in the Bible. It’s scary because, like most things, it’s either true or it isn’t. But if we’re honest, it usually feels like this verse isn’t true. And if it isn’t true, then we can’t trust anything else that Jesus says. But if Jesus is actually telling the truth, that means that we actually can do the things He did and then some. But how? And why don’t we ever see anyone walking on water?

Jesus goes on in this passage to explain that when He ascends, the Father is going to send the Holy Spirit to help the disciples. Then in Acts 1:8, he reminds them that they’ll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them. Then a chapter later, the Holy Spirit comes, everyone speaks in tongues, Peter preaches, and 3,000 people get saved. And for the rest of the book of Acts, what follows is stuff straight out of a Harry Potter novel with people getting healed by Peter’s shadow, Paul raising people from the dead, and Philip teleporting.

But why don’t we see that kind of power in our lives today? Maybe it goes back to what I said in the first truth. We have this power in us, but we don’t exercise it because we don’t believe that it’s there. And because we don’t exercise it, we don’t see it. In Man of Steel, Superman has to jump and crash a few times before learning how to fly. Likewise, we pray for healing a few times and nothing happens. So we stop believing and stop trying. But if we keep stepping out on faith and keep praying, we’ll see God’s power.

But here’s a caveat. Jesus says that you will do greater things than He did. But He also says that in this life you’ll have trouble. So we have power to heal people, but not everyone we pray for will be healed. Remember, Jesus raised Lazarus, but John the Baptist stayed dead. Not everyone we pray for will be healed and demons won’t be cast out every time we pray, but the point remains the same: you have power over these things.

Homework #6: What would someone with Jesus’ power do today? Is your friend sick? Has your roommate been having demonic nightmares? Believe who you are and act like who you are.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12

Prayer: Lord, You promised that You would give me power through the Holy Spirit. Today, I choose to believe that I have power to do the things You did while on Earth. Show me how You want me to use that power today and I will choose to use it.
**Right Standing with Jesus**  
*2 Corinthians 5:20-21 (ESV)*  
(by Siobhan Seaman)

**II Corinthians 5:20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.  
**21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In Ephesians 6:14, Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to stand firm and to put on the whole armor of God, one of those pieces of armor being the Breastplate of Righteousness. According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary the term *Righteous* means, “acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin”. When I see this word and it’s meaning I think “unattainable”.

Some of you try so hard to be “good” and some of you may have given up because no matter how hard you try, you always fail. Maybe you’ve had this conversation in your head or with a trusted friend and have said, “I can’t believe I did this ________ (fill in the blank) again!! I’ll never get it right!”

Personally, I can relate but friends, take heart. Jesus died and rose again so that we could have right standing or righteousness in God by dying on the cross for our sins. The first step towards righteous living is accepting the gift of God’s righteousness, through Jesus only.

> “I didn’t want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God’s righteousness.” *Philippians 3:9 (The Message)*

**Prayer:** Jesus, there are so many times I fail and stumble in my sin. I recognize that I need to accept your righteousness. I repent for pridefully thinking I can do this on my own. Show me what it means to live out the righteousness you’ve given me. Today, I put on the Breastplate of Righteousness.
Romans 6:20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We were slaves to sin. Sadly, some of us are still in the trappings of habitual sin. God being a holy God, can’t coexist with our sin. In the text above is says, “the wages of sin is death” and God has never compromised with this issue. Sin is the great divider in our relationship with Him. If sin were a person, he or she would be like the “other” woman or man in a marriage relationship. Once you’ve commitment adultery against God by sinning, you sever the tie of the relationship. Thankfully God is fully loving and devoted and he intervened by sending His perfect son Jesus to pay our expensive bill. Jesus fully died on a cross for a crime he didn’t commit and he faithfully rose again so that you and I can have a life worth living.

If we need to receive the righteousness of God we also need to be honest with the ways we fall short, the ways we sin. You might know off the top of your head where you fail but Jesus is better at identifying your sin areas better than you do. He’s here right now in this moment and He can talk to you about your brokenness.

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 
Romans 6:1-2 (NIV)

Prayer: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts (Psalm 139:23)”. Show me the sin areas of my life that you want to address. I trust you because you know me better than I know myself. Guide me to live a righteous life in you. In Jesus name, amen. If the Lord has convicted you of sin, your next step is to repent and ask for His forgiveness. Also, I would encourage you to live in the light by confession. Talk to a trusted mentor, Pastor or Office of Spiritual Formation staff for further help and guidance.
**Friend of God**

**John 15:14-15 (NIV)**

(by Siobhan Seaman)

**John 15:14** You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Friendship grows better with age. The more you choose to be honest and real with good people, the safer you’ll feel to be yourself: the good, bad and or ugly. As you grow in relationship you learn each other’s dislikes and likes. Sometimes you learn to take on certain personality traits that you admire most- like their laugh, style of dress, etc.. In healthy friendships you know that you are loved for YOU.

Jesus is inviting us into friendship that will last forever. He doesn’t want a robot or servant he desires for us to KNOW Him- His heart, His plan and His agenda. This requires a vulnerability and honesty on both our parts but Jesus is willing to go there with us. When we enter into a living, breathing relationship with God we are able to take on His personality traits and righteousness. We know what He likes and doesn’t and because we love Him we obey Him.

Who am I that You are mindful of me
That You hear me, when I call
Is it true that you are thinking of me
How You love me
It’s amazing

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend

God almighty Lord of Glory
You have called me friend

“Friend of God” by Israel Houghton

**Prayer:** Jesus, it is a profound mystery that you desire to be my friend. Thank you for seeking me out and for inviting me into a journey of relationship with you. Today, I choose to walk out of our friendship. I love you. Amen.
Believing
James 2:22-24 (NIV)
(by Siobhan Seaman)

James 2:22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

On my wedding day I walked down a long aisle leading up to the altar. Our families and friends were there to witness one of the biggest decisions of our lives. Leading up to this day I always knew in my head that marriage was a lifelong decision, not to be taken lightly. When my husband proposed to me I said YES without hesitation. July 2007 we said our vows before God and to each other. As soon as the ceremony was over it truly hit me that I was no longer a single person. Marriage would be my new reality for my entire life.

There are many benefits to marriage like companionship, intimacy, sharing in life’s burdens, etc.. but if I live a life contrary to that commitment, I am living a lie. For example, if I continue to date other people that would be false to who I’ve become.

Like being married, we are the Bride of Christ. Through this relationship we receive the benefits of being eternally His. One of these benefits is His righteousness. When we put on the armor of God we must believe that we’ve become the righteousness of God. We must believe by faith that we are who he says we are and live that out with Him.

“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”
Genesis 15:16 (NIV)

Prayer: Jesus, I choose to believe you today. When I believe you I remember your covenant to me, who I am in You and my commitment to love you. In Your Name, Amen.
Obeying
John 14:12-16 (NIV)
(by Siobhan Seaman)

John 14:12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. 15 “If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—”

When it comes to protecting your heart against the devil’s crafty schemes you must first be a friend to Jesus. Secondly, you must believe what he says is true from relationship. Finally you must obey Him. Friends, live like you know God. Obedience is the evidence of you knowing and loving God. Obedience is just a performance, unless it’s the overflow of hearts in relationship with Christ.

Sometimes obedience is risky, hard and challenging. When we obey God we acknowledge that His character is good and that we trust Him to do what’s best in our lives and in the lives of others.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.
Philippians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Prayer: Jesus, it’s hard to obey sometimes and as a human I like to be in control. In this time I recognize that you are a good and trustworthy father. Lord, where my experience does not line up with your truth please remind me of who you are.
Oil of Joy  
Hebrew 1:8-9 (NIV)  
(by Siobhan Seaman)

8 But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companion by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

Our God is a God of righteousness, justice and mercy. He knows what it’s like to struggle in this life. He was tempted with everything but never make a sinful mistake. He lived completely out of relationship, knew the joy of belonging and His ministry and ultimate sacrifice are the fruit.

Wearing the breastplate of righteousness protects our hearts and allows us to experience the joy and life we were meant to have in Christ. Today, I want to encourage you to put on righteousness and to know this joy.

Won’t you walk into the room and bring us love?  
Beauty for ashes  
Joy for mourning  
Praise for heaviness  
I am for Your Glory

“Beauty for Ashes” by Anthony Skinner

Prayer: Jesus, the joy of knowing you and accepting you as Lord of my life is salvation. Thank for dying on the cross for me so that I may know life in You. Thank you that I’m alone and that I can experience Your goodness now. In Jesus name, Amen.