

DEVOTIONS

June 2008

The devotions for June were written by J.R. Butler, Rachael Cox, and Stephanie Ash.

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DEVOTION .001

DAY 1

Romans 8:26-27

Ever find yourself at a loss for words? It never fails that at the time you need them most, they're just not there. Those times may include a discussion with some friends or co-workers, or possibly giving a testimony before a crowd, or maybe just in normal everyday conversation. There is one time when we never have to worry about this happening: talking with God. Romans 8:26-27 plainly states, "The Spirit Himself intercedes for us." God loves us so much that He sent his Spirit to help us through our day-to-day walks, right down to prayer! Sometimes when I sit down to pray, I have no idea what's going to come of it, but the Holy Spirit always moves and I walk away feeling encouraged.

Never think you need an agenda to pray to God; all you need is an open heart and His Spirit will do the rest.

DAY 2

Acts 4:1-22

Are you familiar with the slogan, "There's strong, and there's Army strong"? Well there's a parallel to that slogan for the Christian faith: "There's boldness, and there's God's boldness." Boldness is a characteristic that many Christians long for but seemingly lack in abundance. In Acts 4 we find an amazing story of two uneducated fishermen proclaiming the gospel before thousands of people. Because of their preaching, they're arrested and brought before "educated" men to explain themselves. Without fear of persecution, Peter and John again proclaimed the message of Christ. How could they do this? Look closely in verse 8: "Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit ..." They weren't relying on their own strength for boldness, they were tapped into God's boldness and in Him they found strength.

Want to be bold like that? Who doesn't? The good news is that all Christians have access to that boldness through the Holy Spirit. Verse 13 notes that these men recognized

that Peter and James “had been with Jesus.” It’s that simple. Because of our relationship with Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and from Him we receive God’s boldness.

DAY 3

John 16:8-16

How do you know when you’re going the right way on the interstate? On those long road trips we all go on with our friends, we usually rely on a map to direct us as we drive to wherever it is we’re going. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a map of life— something that shows us every right turn to make so we’d never get lost?

John 16 tells us that the Holy Spirit serves as such a guide in the Christian’s life. Look closely at verse 13: “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” Jesus uses the word *guide* on purpose. A guide is someone who knows the right path and knows how to get his or her followers to the destination safely.

As Christians, we have a guide in the Holy Spirit. Just as you wouldn’t want to lose your guide while climbing Mt. Everest, you don’t want to lose sight of your guide through life. Spend time each day getting to know Jesus and His Spirit and watch as the Holy Spirit leads you down the path God desires for your life.

DAY 4

John 14:15-31

Isn’t it nice when you’re studying for a difficult exam or final and someone who knows the material backwards and forwards happens to be sitting there to help you when you get stuck? At times during my academic career I’ve found myself frustrated by confusing new material. I have to admit, there’ve been times in Bible study when I’ve felt the exact same way. I’ll be reading a passage and come to a verse or set of verses that I don’t understand. In those moments I wish someone like C. H. Spurgeon was sitting next to me ready to explain away my confusion.

In John 14 Jesus told His disciples of the One who is coming after Jesus dies—the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit by another name, the Counselor. A counselor is someone whose primary job is to eliminate confusion. In verse 26, Jesus said the Counselor “will teach [us] all things.” Spurgeon would be great to have around, but we have the ultimate Counselor already present. Rely on the Holy Spirit to help you interpret Scripture and live your daily walk.

DAY 5

Romans 2:6-16

Do you know the difference between knowledge and wisdom? I’ve heard it said that knowledge is simply knowing how to do something, while wisdom is having the skill to put knowledge into practice. Wisdom is basically knowledge applied. As Christians we have access to the greatest source of wisdom—God. Verse 12 tells us that God gives us His Holy Spirit so that we may understand the things of God. “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10).

Think about that for just a minute. We have access to the very deepest things of God through His Spirit. Imagine how vastly different things would be if we would just rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal the things God has in store for us, and then follow where He leads. As you live out your relationship with God, use His Holy Spirit to gain wisdom

and discernment. There's no better source out there, and you have complete access to it through spending time daily getting to know God more intimately.

DEVOTION .002

DAY 1

Matthew 5:43-48

How much do you love your best friend? Really think about how much you love him or her. Now compare that to how much you love someone you wouldn't consider to be your friend. If you're anything like me, there's somewhat of a difference between the two amounts of love. Let's go a step further. Compare your love for your best friend to your love toward someone who dislikes you a lot. Is the gap getting larger? Yeah, mine too.

Throughout our Christian journey, we'll encounter many "enemies of our faith." I use this term loosely to define a group of people who dislike us because of our relationship with God. Believe it or not, this is a large, growing group of people. Jesus is very specific in how we are to deal with people who are "enemies"—love them. It's very simple, yet very difficult to follow. Love is what separates Christians from the rest of the world. Love is the greatest tool in breaking down barriers that hinder the lost from coming to Christ. As you encounter those who are resistant to your faith, show them love. By doing so you'll have a great impact on them that could possibly echo in eternity.

DAY 2

Ephesians 4:17–5:21

When was the last time you were locked in a jail cell for following Christ? Chances are pretty good you've never been locked up because of your faith. Before the collapse of the U.S.S.R., Christianity in Russia only existed underground. During the reign of the Soviet Union, Christians were imprisoned, beaten, and killed for their faith. But the underground church continued to thrive. The church during this period was consistently persecuted and many members spent years in prison. After years of imprisonment, many of the very same guards assigned with the task of guarding these prisoners became Christians themselves. How did this transformation happen?

In the book *Tortured For Christ*, Richard Wurmbrand wrote: "I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with 50 pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold—and praying with a fervor for the Communists." By living as children of light, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, God can use our faith to permeate even the darkest of hearts. There will be times when your faith will not be accepted. In those moments, shine like stars and let your faith testify to how great our God really is. God can use something this simple to change even the blackest of hearts.

DAY 3

Philippians 3:12–4:1

What if I told you that I wanted you to enter a dodge-ball tournament, and that if you entered, and gave 100 percent effort, you would win a million dollars? You don't have to win, all you have to do is play with all your heart from the time you enter to the time you

either win or are eliminated. You'd probably get pretty pumped up and be ready to play. The Christian life is similar to this. When we accept Christ, He doesn't expect us all to be dynamic speakers or powerful writers. All He expects is 100 percent of our hearts to be committed to Him. Once our hearts are completely focused on Him, that relationship begins to spill over into every other relationship we have, and that's when lives begin to change around us. God rewards those who are wholly committed to Him with a relationship with Him, but also with eternal life in heaven.

As Paul said in verse 14, "I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus." If we stand firm in our faith, God has a reward waiting for us at the end of this life. When you find yourself surrounded by those who oppose your faith, be encouraged that Christ rewards those who run earnestly.

DAY 4

Matthew 22:34-40

What is the one thing that all "chick flicks" have in common? Love. In fact, what is the one thing that everyone looks for in one form or another? Love. As humans, we're created with the capacity to show love, and we're created to want to receive love. No other living thing on the planet looks for love the way a person does. That's why Jesus summed up the entire Bible with love. Even though His summary was simple, practicing it is not. But one of the most powerful ways to reach a lost world is simply through showing love. When we experience times when our Christian witness is not welcomed, we can break down those barriers and reach those on the other side with love.

Ask God to allow His love to spill into your day-to-day relationships with those around you. And when He does, don't be surprised to see some changed hearts.

DAY 5

1 Peter 4:7-11

What are your first thoughts when you hear the word *servant*? To be honest, sometimes my first thoughts are something like this: "weakness, pushover, or lowly." However, being a servant is none of these things. *Christian*, when translated, literally means "little Christ," and Christ came to serve, not to be served. Jesus set the bar very high for us, and He expects us to follow. Serving others is an amazingly powerful tool to reach those around us. When you serve someone, you purposely place that person's needs above your own. Believe it or not, that impacts people.

When you find yourself in a situation in which those around you are responding negatively to your faith, find ways to serve them. By doing so, you enable them to see our heavenly Father through you and open doors for God to work in their lives. Look for opportunities today to serve others, then watch how God moves.

DEVOTION .003

DAY 1

Daniel 3

Are you willing to count the cost? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego definitely make my list of top 10 favorite people of the Bible. These guys were cool, even in a fiery furnace. I think as Christians one way we try to prove that we have an intimate

relationship with God is by telling people how much we trust Him to be in control of our lives. But if you're honest with yourself, do you think you would offer up yourself to a fiery furnace for Him? I know trusting God with little things is even hard for me sometimes. But He remains faithful even when I am without faith (2 Tim. 2:13).

I quickly learned this in one of my classes last semester. One of the assignments went completely against my values and made me very uncomfortable. I felt defeated because neither my classmates nor my professor seemed to care. But something happened that completely turned the assignment around in my favor, and I knew it couldn't have been anything but God. The faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not only saved them, but also caused King Nebuchadnezzar to praise Almighty God.

DAY 2

Ruth 1-4

Will I ever get out of this pit? Sometimes when we are going through a stressful situation, we think life will never get better. But that is a lie Satan wants you to believe. The truth is, if you seek after God in those tough times, He will bring the light at the end of the tunnel. He has promised to never leave or forsake us (Josh. 1:5). When Ruth's husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law all died, she could have easily given up. Instead, she pressed on and remained loyal to Naomi.

Through God's faithfulness, Ruth's life was restored. Not only did she find love again, she also became a mother, and probably most significant was that she is a part of Jesus' genealogy. How's that for a light at the end of the tunnel?

DAY 3

Genesis 45:4-7

How can I forgive those who put me in this horrible situation? This is a question I have repeatedly struggled with. I have been placed in certain situations in my life when friendships or relationships have completely turned my life upside down. But through my experiences I have learned how to better relate to people. Not in a "pretend-to-understand" type of relating but a real understanding that enables me to say, "When that happened to me, I felt the same way. This is how God brought me through it." I can't say that I have had the kind of experience Joseph had, but the theme is the same.

God can use any problem or situation to bring glory to His kingdom. Joseph had every reason to be resentful toward his family, but he saw the greater purpose of his struggles. God used him to save his family's lives. We must learn to forgive those who hurt us. After all, Jesus forgave us despite all of our iniquities.

DAY 4

John 11:1-44

How do the valleys benefit me in my walk with Christ? I have an easy answer for that: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Not until you experience brokenness are you truly able to rely on God's strength. You must die to yourself and surrender to Him. The process of dying to myself has not come easily for me, but the more I put all my trust and hope in Him, the more peace I experience. Jesus' unfathomable love for us is demonstrated in His friendship with Lazarus. "Jesus wept." Our magnificent God weeps for us. He isn't detached from us. He

has a genuine love for us. Through the death and resurrection of their brother, Mary and Martha were able to see the glory of God. Jesus freed Lazarus from death, and it is the same Jesus who gives us life.

DAY 5

Acts 16:16-40

What is the difference between happiness and joy? Maybe the thought that these are two totally different words isn't a new concept for you, but when I read about this difference in a book not long ago, I had an epiphany. The author talked about happiness being based on external circumstances and joy being based on eternal circumstances. Unfortunately, because of the world we live in, the possibility of our being "happy" all the time is unlikely. For those who have come to the saving knowledge of Christ, there is joy.

Paul's life is a great example of someone whose external circumstances limited his chances of being happy, but whose eternal circumstances gave him joy. Paul and Silas were flogged and imprisoned for casting a demon out of a slave girl, but through their ministry God used them not only to bring joy to their fellow prisoners, but to also set them free.

DEVOTION .004

DAY 1

1 Timothy 1:12-17

What does it take to become a child of God? A popular notion among Christians today is that once we've prayed our prayer and accepted Jesus into our hearts, our job is done. We've done our duty, and can expect to enjoy eternity in heaven, whether or not our daily lives reflect an attitude of faith in Christ. Though this is easy and requires little commitment on our part, it cheapens the value of God's grace. It is grace alone, not any process of our own strength, that brings us salvation. Once Christ adopts us into His family, He appoints us to His service. He asks us to live our faith by performing good works for His kingdom. The beautiful thing is that He asks all kinds of people to join in this task—even people who are living in rebellion against Him. After all, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Our salvation is not dependent on anything we do; God brings about salvation for the sake of His own glory! Let's live our lives in response to this precious truth.

DAY 2

Galatians 1:11-24

How should the truth of the gospel affect our daily lives? When we receive the gospel, we receive the grace of God. God is the only one who can achieve salvation for His children, and He sets these children apart before they are even born. Understanding this, it becomes clear that salvation cannot be based upon our actions. After all, God sets us apart to be in His family before we have even performed any actions! He creates us with a special purpose in mind and a unique role to fill in His kingdom.

A friend of mine has a saying, "What greater thing can a thing do than the thing for which it was created?" If you are a follower of Christ, you have been created to bring

glory to God, and there is no greater thing that you could ever do. Persevere in your faith by remaining obedient to Christ!

DAY 3

Colossians 2:6-7

What does a faithful follower of Christ truly look like? In Paul's Letter to the Colossians, he told Christians to walk in Jesus just as they received Him, "rooted and built up in Him." A *root*, according to Merriam-Webster, is "the usually underground part of a seed plant body, [which] ... functions as an organ of absorption, aeration, and food storage or as a means of anchorage or support." We, as followers of Christ, are to make Him our root system. He is to be our source of life, the Supplier of all our needs and desires, and the Rock on which we stand. As Christ provides for us, we should be "overflowing with thankfulness" toward Him.

How do we demonstrate our thankfulness for all He has done for us? We diligently follow after Him. We live lives of faith and of active worship for the One who has given us everything. In doing this, we will encounter our Savior, and there is nothing more beautiful, glorious, or breathtaking.

DAY 4

Hebrews 11:6; James 2:14-26

If God offers salvation without regard to actions or behavior, does that mean He doesn't care how we live our lives? Not at all! The writer of Hebrews declared that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Impossible. It can't be done. This faith that the author speaks about is so much more than belief. It is an active devotion to the Lord who saves us. It is a response to His relentless pursuit of us, and it is made evident by our works.

James wrote, in 2:17, that without works faith is dead. True faith demands action; it cannot remain stagnant. Those who develop this passionate faith are rewarded with the ability to draw near to God. Think about the implications of that statement. When God, the Creator of the universe, the Author of glory and beauty and all perfection, seeks after us and offers us salvation from our sins, and we respond by seeking after Him and faithfully obeying His requests, we are able to come into direct contact with Him!

Work to develop a purposeful faith, and taste and see for yourself the beautiful goodness of our Lord.

DAY 5

2 Corinthians 2:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

What does it take to make disciples? So many people cling to the Great Commission as their motivation to go into the world and convert all the lost souls to Christianity. If that becomes our goal, however, we have missed the point of the gospel. It is God who brings His children to salvation. It is our job as His followers to obey Him in faith. I think we have lost sight of the importance of encouraging our fellow believers.

Paul called the church "the aroma of Christ" among believers and non-believers alike. Once we discover what a true faith in Christ looks like, it is our responsibility to encourage our brothers and sisters who are still working to achieve that goal. Not only is it our responsibility, it is something that should flow naturally out of the grace in our lives.

Find someone this week who could use some encouragement in their faith and demonstrate to them what the love of Christ truly looks like!

DEVOTION .005

DAY 1

Ephesians 3:4-6

Who is eligible to become a member of the family of God? Throughout the Old Testament times, the answer to this question would have been the Jewish people. The Jews were God's chosen nation and the ones who God revealed Himself to. When Jesus came into the world, however, all that changed. Through Christ, God has made salvation available to all people. All nations, tribes, and languages are called to have fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Not only that, they are considered *fellow heirs* with the Jews as members of the same body—the body of Christ. Thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus, the division between Jew and Gentile has been torn away, giving everyone the chance to be partakers in the promise of God!

DAY 2

Daniel 7:13-14

Why share the gospel at all? Religion in today's world is widely considered a personal experience, and something that must be discovered by everyone for themselves. In this environment, the true motivation for spreading the good news can be easily lost. Many who share the gospel message are so intent on laying out the plan of salvation that they forget about the bigger picture.

Jesus was given a kingdom in which all peoples, nations, and languages will serve Him. He has the ultimate authority, and all glory is due Him! When we share the gospel among the nations, it is less for the sake of individual people than for the glory and honor of Christ. Our motivation should be that Christ deserves praise and adoration from everyone, but He is not currently receiving it.

Take some time today to meditate on the glory of Christ and how you can be a part of making it known to the world around you.

DAY 3

Titus 2:11-15

How often do we try to interfere with God's plan? We see someone who is different, unpopular, or unlovable, and instead of seeing them with God's eyes, we see them through the eyes of the world. We forget that the grace of God has brought salvation for *all people*. The reason Christ gave Himself was to "cleanse for Himself a special people." This is our "blessed hope," and we are charged to declare it to the *world*—not only to the people we think are worthy to hear it.

Make an effort to see the world as Christ sees it, and you will see a world of people in desperate need of hope. We have the hope they are looking for! Let us not be stingy with it.

DAY 4

Psalm 96:1-4; Romans 10:14

Psalm 96 is a song praising the sovereign glory of God. It is also a song of how this glory should be made known throughout all the nations of the earth. The whole world is called to give praise to the Lord. As followers of God, this should flow naturally from our lips. Our constant adoration of Him should radiate through our lives. Part of adoring the Lord is telling of his salvation “from day to day.” Evangelism is not something we should have to set apart time to do—it is something that should be an integral part of a life lived out in love and devotion to Christ.

God deserves praise from all the people of the world, but how will they know of His greatness unless someone shares it with them?

DAY 5

Revelation 7:9-10

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? Most people think of golden streets, clouds, and angels, but do they ever think of diversity? We are told in the Book of Revelation that one day “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language” will worship around the throne of God. Every people group in the world has a place in God’s kingdom. From the Kurds of Iraq, to the Tatars of Russia, to the Khmers of Cambodia, every nation will be represented as songs rise up in fervent adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christians, it is important for us to remember that salvation belongs to God, not to ourselves. We must be generous with the truth, clinging to the hope that one day we, too, will be members of the international choir singing praises to the King of Kings. Think about how this hope will change your view of the world we live in.

DEVOTIONS

July 2008

The devotions for July were written by Rachel Walley, Rachael Cox, and Audrey Johnson.

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DEVOTION .006

DAY 1

Deuteronomy 30:20

Do you ever wonder if God has turned off His heavenly hearing aid? Well, I have, and it's at those times when I have to remind myself that no matter how long or how loud I pray, my spoken words of beseeching do not determine the outcome of my current situation. God is sovereign. He always has been and always will be, and whether the answer to my prayer is a yes or a no, the answer is still perfect.

I've come to realize that prayer is a gift to us from our sovereign Father. It gives us an instant bond as believers, and direct access to the comfort of Christ that comes when we realize that every time we open our hearts to pray, the Creator of the universe recognizes our distinct voices, our voices that are a profession of our faith. And if we listen closely, He whispers to us, "Child, I hear you, and I've got everything under control."

DAY 2

2 Thessalonians 1:11

I have always loved the fact that Paul left the New Testament equivalent of a prayer request list at the end of all of his letters to the churches. Paul understood that a common concern for fellow Christians, and their current situations, unites us as believers. When we give our lives to follow Christ, we are not promised a cakewalk. But we are promised that we will never walk alone, which is something the world cannot claim. So our prayers for each other unite us in an understanding that times may be trying, but we have a God who hears us.

Our fellow Christians are an earthly representation of the heavenly promise that we will never be alone. Crying out together and for one another is much less lonely than walking through daily life alone.

DAY 3

Psalm 46:10

Why in the world are there only 24 hours in a day? Sometimes there is just not enough time. But the interesting thing is, when we are forced to choose what will take priority, at least in my experience, God inevitably takes the backburner. We spend countless hours a day taking care of things that can't take care of themselves, and the rest of the hours worrying about how we are going to get everything done. Our relationship with the Caretaker of our own lives gets forgotten. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, NIV). I know it's easier said than done, but taking time in our day to be still before God has a way of taking care of all the things we were filling our time with.

Concentrate on listening and petitioning God about the worries of your heart and the hearts of those you love. He's listening, and He wants to spend time with you.

DAY 4

Hebrews 11:40

Aren't you grateful that our wellbeing doesn't depend on our own ability? If that were the case, I can only imagine the state our lives would be in! The Creator of the universe has beautifully orchestrated the hours of our lives, and we have been given an invitation to join in on the event. Our communication with God allows us to be attuned to His heart, and we gain strength and understanding by having such a direct connection to this life-giving source. We won't be given all the details, but through our consistent prayers He holds us close to His chest. As Stephen Curtis Chapman sings, we can "listen to the rhythm of His unfailing heart of love."

DAY 5

Isaiah 35:2

"Yes" or "no." I like these kinds of answers—black and white responses to questions that I can neatly fit into two distinct categories. Most of the time, God's answer to us isn't so clean cut. In the thick of our problems, we forget that our chief purpose is not to get a yes or no from God but to glorify Him in whatever kind of answer we receive. Remember, it isn't about us. It's easy to be caught up in how we will fair at the end of our respective storms, but in the end God is always sovereign, and our situations provide the perfect opportunity for His sovereignty to be displayed. Look at what He did for Peter. God didn't immediately remove him from persecution; instead God allowed the situation to develop so Peter's life would be a testimony of God's love and provision for His people.

DEVOTION .007

DAY 1

Acts 6:3-4

If you've ever taken a mission trip, do you have specific memories about the first one? You probably had grandiose ideas about how your presence in people's lives, for the time you were there, would have an amazing impact on them forever. OK, so that sounds a little self-absorbed, but if we take a step back and really think about it, that isn't too far from the truth. The irony is that nine times out of ten, you are the one that comes away

the most changed. We have drifted from our true mission to be conduits for Christ. Instead we are empty vessels.

If you let Him, God will fill you up, send you out, and change people through you, not because of you. And I'll let you in on a secret: He just might use them to be a missionary to you.

DAY 2

Matthew 28:19-20

When it comes to ministry, do you ever feel like you have no clue where to start? Do I go overseas? Do I go alone or with a group? Should it be a medical trip or sports camp? There are a lot of options, and the choices seem endless. Sometimes we go looking for ministry in every place except where we are now. Don't get me wrong—I'm a big fan of mission trips. My t-shirt collection serves as a testament to that fact! However, I tend to forget that every morning when I wake up, I enter a mission field. Whether it's the patient I take care of in the hospital, or the lady who bags my groceries, each one is my mission field. It can be as simple as a genuine smile, or as specific as a discussion about your relationship with God.

So, while you are looking for that overseas trip to go on (and I encourage you to do so), remember that you are on a mission every day.

DAY 3

Mark 5:22-23

Don't you love a really good hug? I'm a firm believer in the power of touch. As a nursing student, I physically touch a lot of people, and I'm amazed at how many people cannot remember the last time they were hugged! I grew up in a family of huggers, so that idea is foreign to me. I think touch is a mission-minded attitude that we can take every day. While we may not be gifted to teach or preach, and our singing might resemble a screech rather than a melody, we are all capable of touch. Taking the time to give a hug, hold a hand, or pat a shoulder conveys that you are acknowledging the person. In many cases, that is what they need most—to be seen, recognized, and valued. Remember, Jesus ate with the tax collector, washed the feet of the man who would betray Him, and gave the blind man sight, all with His touch. Start there, He'll do the rest.

DAY 4

1 John 4:19

All we need is love. I'm not referring to the famous words penned by John, Paul, George, and Ringo. It is a statement that crosses generational gaps, cultural barriers, and socioeconomic status. When we get down to the bare essentials, all we really want and need is to be loved. Unfortunately, our capability as humans to love is flawed, to say the least.

Thank goodness, the news we have to share is that we have found perfect love! That fact speaks every language. Our Father even told us in His Word that the greatest of His commands to us is that we should love. Our imperfect attempt is the earthly example of the perfect love of our Father. Our greatest mission is to love—regardless of skin color, customs, geography, or any other category. May we all be in pursuit of the same perfect love.

DAY 5

Romans 8:26-27

“He can’t use it ’til it’s broken; not until its eyes are opened; not until this earthen vessel learns, its feet are made of clay. So when arrogance surrenders, and this broken heart grows tender, it is then that God can begin to fill this vessel with His grace.” Cynthia Clawson sang these words, and I don’t know of a better word picture for how God views our obedience.

Until we allow ourselves to be rid of our own agendas, we will miss great opportunity. Be still and know that He is God. Let that be enough. And when it is, you will be amazed at the things He asks you to do with Him.

DEVOTION .008

DAY 1

Matthew 28:19-20

As believers under the new covenant, what is our purpose? We are to make disciples of all nations. That’s kind of a big role to play. Sometimes I find this really difficult. Life is so much easier when you live in the Christian bubble. Everyone’s nice and loving. Everyone believes what you believe. Life is grand.

OK, while things may not always great within your circle of Christian friends, you can’t deny you are probably more content in that circle than immersed in groups of non-believers. Unfortunately, making disciples of all nations takes a little more effort than most people like to put forth. My litmus test for gauging whether or not I am doing my part in sharing the gospel is the amount of spiritual opposition I am facing. The last thing Satan wants is for one more person to trust Christ. God promises to prepare you for battle, so put on the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18) so that you are prepared when you face opposition for your work in advancing the gospel.

DAY 2

Matthew 22:37

We are tasked with sharing the gospel, and it is important for us to know the essential elements of that message. As Jesus said, the greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. These commandments are absolutely essential for sharing our faith with other people. Some Christians, in their pursuit to be “right,” become very legalistic, placing less emphasis on the importance of the freedom we have in Christ and more emphasis on doctrine and rules.

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we are no longer governed and enslaved by law; but because we love Him, the law is written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33). Instead of law, we have been given grace. This wonderful gift of grace is free to anyone who wants to receive it. Faith alone is required to enter into this covenant. Faith is the means by which we love God, and when we love God, we must love His people.

DAY 3

James 1:19-27; 3

How should we handle conflict within the body of Christ? I think most people can agree that trying to persuade someone to believe exactly what you believe is very near

impossible. Especially difficult is attempting to argue doctrinal or theological issues. What I have learned, especially since I began college, is that these arguments are a complete waste of time unless the other person is just way off base; and even if the person is way off base, your desire to speak truth to them *must* be led by the Spirit.

Trusting that God will give you wisdom in these kinds of situations is necessary if you want to participate in helping the other person grow in their walk with the Lord. Along with asking God for wisdom, ask that He enable you to see and love the person through His eyes. If that person can see that your love is genuine, he or she is much more likely to be receptive to what you have to say.

DAY 4

Romans 2:17-29

Who is invited into the body of Christ? We are blessed to be under the new covenant. Because of Christ's sacrifice we are not bound by laws, and we have the opportunity for a real and personal relationship with the Father. God's love is not for a select group of people. He desires to see all of His children accept the gift He has given through Christ.

As Christians we have some idea of the depth of His love for us, and we struggle to understand why anyone wouldn't want the kind of joy that comes from knowing Him. It is important for us to ask God for understanding and opportunities to tell the lost about the freedom given through our Savior.

I have been a believer since I was 7 years old, but for a while I was enslaved by the idea that being a Christian really only meant being a good person and following a bunch of rules. That belief made me miserable. When God broke me of this huge misconception, I was finally experienced freedom in Him.

DAY 5

1 Corinthians 12

How can we function as a unified body? Something essential to remember is that God has gifted each of us in many different ways. Arguments often arise within the church because people are not being understanding of each other's spiritual gifts. We think that because we are a certain way, that's the most efficient way to be, and everyone else should be like that too.

My life is like an open book. I don't keep secrets about myself. When I feel something, I'll let you know. But what I have discovered is that most people aren't like me in that respect. Sometimes I find this to be the most frustrating thing in the world. Because I tell people everything I know, I expect everyone else to tell me everything they know.

But the body of Christ doesn't need a whole bunch of "telling-everything-you-know" kind of people—we tend to be talkers. The body of Christ needs a balance, and listeners are just as important. God has given each of us a role to play so that we are able to bring as many people to His kingdom as possible.

DEVOTION .009

DAY 1

Philippians 2:1-5

Shrek: *Why are you following me?*

Donkey: *'Cause I'm all alone. There's no one here beside me. My problems have all gone, there's no one to deride me. But you gotta have friends ...*

Shrek: *Stop singing! Why, that's no wonder why you don't have friends.*

Donkey: *Wow! Only a true friend would be that truly honest.*

Donkey and Shrek rarely agreed on anything, but they were always able to carry out their adventurous tasks together as a team. What a creative God we serve! He could have made us look, act, and think in the exact same ways, but instead, He made each one of us in a very unique way.

As Christians we are all on the same mission to glorify God, however, we sometimes have different ideas of how to do that. I believe Jesus has the perfect solution. He tells us to look out for the best interest of others, considering them better than ourselves. And what a challenge this is, to take on the attitude of Christ! But this is the way we, as the collective body of Christ, bring glory to His name.

DAY 2

2 Timothy 3:14-15

Have you ever heard that the most difficult mission field is your own family? I was really excited when my youngest sister told me she was coming to visit me. God spoke to me and said, "This is it; now is the time to *tell* her what abundant life is all about." I had been a Christian for four years, but I had yet to actually sit down with her and explain the gospel. I used to think that if I just *showed* her that I was a Christian, surely she would come to know Jesus.

On our way to my church, I took a deep breath and shared with her what I thought she already knew. My 17-year-old sister, who once found happiness in drugs, alcohol, and partying, began to cry as God worked on her heart. Before she left to go home that day, she prayed with me to receive Christ for the first time. Now she is chasing hard after God as she shares Christ with others who are empty, just as she used to be.

DAY 3

Mark 1:16-18

What does it really mean to be a disciple? While we talk about it all the time and are even commanded as believers to go and make disciples of all nations, do we really know how to disciple someone or if we are even a disciple ourselves?

I recently went fishing with several kids at a lake in Virginia. None of them had been fishing before so I was concerned about this great task I had set before me. As soon as I was finished teaching Josh how to fish, I offered to teach Drew, but I was surprised to hear Drew say that he would rather be taught by Josh. In fact, they all were eager to learn from someone who was just as new to fishing as they were. I began the day thinking that I had 10 kids to teach how to fish, but I actually only ended up teaching one. When we disciple someone, we often forget that it is so they too will become a disciple. Jesus said "Come and follow Me; I will make you fishers of men." To be an effective disciple, we must make more disciples.

DAY 4

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

How easy is it for us to praise God when everything in our life is as it should be? What is most difficult, however, is to praise Him in *all* of our circumstances. You're failing a required class—maybe when you retake it next semester you will have four different witnessing opportunities. You just broke up with the person you thought you were going to marry—maybe God is calling you to be single and do missions that will change thousands of hearts throughout all nations.

Regardless of our circumstances, we must remember that God has a plan, and though we may not be able to see it unfold immediately, we should trust in His sovereignty. The next time something turns your life upside down, try taking the road less traveled by rejoicing because you know what is to come. Let us live unselfishly with an eternal perspective, remembering that this is all for His glory.

DAY 5

Revelation 7:9-10

How can I share the gospel with someone of another culture? God is the Creator of all things, and as Creator He has a full knowledge about all of His creation. He knows all languages, cultures, and traditions. There is nothing unfamiliar to Him.

I met Jerry and Akiko in a cafeteria while I was working for a conference in Colorado. I was only on the campus for one week, but I ate lunch with them every day. I found out about what they personally believed, what they like to eat, their favorite music—everything I could. The last day I was on their campus, I was able to share the gospel with them. I will never forget when Akiko said to me, “This is amazing! Why hasn't anyone ever told us this before?” They even came to the worship service I invited them to that night.

The nations *are* hungry for Jesus—we just have to be willing to step out of our comfortable bubbles and tell them about Him.

DEVOTIONS

August 2008

The devotions for August were written by Audrey Johnson, Katie Noel, and Zach Smith.

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DEVOTION .010

DAY 1

Colossians 4:5-6

Has God ever put someone on your heart for the purpose of witnessing to them, but you purposely kept putting it off? I was in a class with Kristen last semester and felt that God was leading me to share my faith with her. She was beautiful and bright, but she seemed hurt and fed up with life. It was the end of the semester and I had yet to share Christ with her, so I prayed that God would give me an opportunity to. On our last day of class she was sitting behind me and asked if I wanted to go with her and a few friends to see a movie. As if God could make it any easier for me, during our class break she also asked me about the gospel. I was able to share my faith with her just by showing up to class—God did everything else.

Non-believers may ask themselves, “Are these Christians serious about what they believe, or is it just another casual part of their lives?” When we are faithful in our daily walk with Christ, when we are genuine, others will want to know more about what this whole Christian life is all about.

DAY 2

Matthew 5:14-16

Can you remember the first seeds that God began to plant in your life through others? I was at the Florida State University gym and noticed two foreign exchange students who were jogging with me on the track. I love learning about other cultures and I love to talk, so I couldn't help but invite myself into their conversation. After learning a little about each another, we exchanged numbers and I invited them to Baptist Collegiate Ministries. I kept in touch with them for a short while before I came back to my hometown for an internship.

The other day I came across their e-mail addresses I wrote down three months ago. I decided to see how they were, so I sent them both e-mails. God never ceases to amaze me. I found out that not only did they visit the BCM, but they are now involved with the international ministry there.

We may not always find out what God will do with the small seeds we plant, but we know what He did with the ones He planted in us, and that alone should be enough reason for us to be faithful.

DAY 3

Matthew 6:1-4

What are your motivations for serving? Is it to win over the heart of that cute guy/girl in your Bible study, or to add points on your list of good deeds? It seems that we often get caught up with the actual act of service and miss the very reason why we are serving.

Christ tells us to serve Him behind closed doors and He will reward us. While we may be fooling everyone around us, we cannot fool the One who examines our very hearts and knows the motivation behind all of our work. Why, then, do we often work so hard to impress others, but we barely take any effort to impress our King?

The ultimate purpose of our service must be focused on Jesus, or it will all have been done in vain. Whether we are ministering to teens at a skate park, serving the people of Thailand, or leading a coffee shop Bible study, we should be doing it all for the glory of Christ.

DAY 4

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Nacho: *I'm a little concerned right now. About...your salvation and stuff. How come you have not been baptized?*

Esqueleto: *Because I never got around to it, OK? I dunno why you always have to be judging me because I only believe in science.*

In *Nacho Libre*, we see two people who share a common interest of wrestling, and because of that commonality, Nacho was able to share his faith with Esqueleto. Some people have the talent to blend in like a chameleon with practically anyone. Isn't it beautiful how God gave us different interests that enable us to relate to the world of non-believers? It is amazing how God can use something seemingly insignificant to lead one of His lost sheep to salvation in Him.

What are your interests? How can you personally share Christ with those whom you already have something in common? Let us follow after Paul's example as he followed Christ. Let us become slaves to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

DAY 5

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Has God ever shown you something about your life in Him through a culture other than your own? There are certain aspects of Christianity that especially appeal to individual cultures. Japan is not only the *largest* unevangelized people group but they also have been known as the "kryptonite" to Jesus. The people of Japan, for example, often find it difficult to deviate from cultural norms and society's high expectations. In fact, when these expectations are not met, suicide is a common way to escape the disappointment. However, this attitude has seen recent shifts as Japanese youth long for freedom from expectation and the chance to stand out as individuals.

What better way to tell the people of Japan about Christ's love than by explaining to them the freedom they have in Him? Freedom is found only in Christ and this is a message of truth for the Japanese.

DEVOTION .011

DAY 1

Acts 20:1-12

Should we put ourselves in danger for Christ if we can help it? According to this passage, no! While enduring dangerous situations in order to perpetuate the truth of Jesus is an admirable thing, even Paul avoided it if at all possible.

There are going to be times when we are persecuted because of Jesus, as He Himself told us in verses such as Matthew 10:22. Even at places like school or work we are expected to stand up for truth in order to win others to Christ. But just like Paul, we should flee danger if possible, as it says in Matthew 10:23, and as Paul wrote in today's passage. God will always expect us to stand up for Him, but one of His ways of standing up for us is by often giving us a way out of dangerous situations.

DAY 2

Acts 20:13-24

How do we get into the habit of obedience? In this passage, Paul listed to the elders of Ephesus all the things he had been doing, including serving despite adversity and preaching without hesitation. Because Paul had made a habit of obedience, he stated that he would be following God's call to Jerusalem, not knowing what would befall him there but aware that danger might be ahead.

Sometimes we get out of the habit of obeying God, and when that happens, it becomes increasingly difficult to get back into the habit. We have to familiarize ourselves with what it feels like to obey God, and the rewards that come to us when we do. If we get into the habit of "just doing it," as Paul did, it will become easier to continue in obedience. Today let's listen for God's voice, grit our teeth and obey, even if we're out of practice!

DAY 3

Acts 20:25-31

How do we become blameless? As Christians our blame is taken from us when we accept Christ, confess our sins to Him, and are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb (John 3:16). In this passage, Paul spoke of being "innocent of everyone's blood" (v. 26), because he had proclaimed the gospel without fear. If only we could be so brave! Our friends, coworkers, and even families may never taste eternity unless we speak up.

Witnessing is the way to bring people into the fold, and if we are fearless about it, like Paul, we will not have the blood of the people we know and love on our heads. All we can do is proclaim Christ and pray, and God will do the rest. Today, witness without fear. It might save someone's life.

DAY 4

Acts 20:32-37

What makes us “missable”? We miss friends and family who move away or pass away. We miss people who have given us cause to love them, by being kind, appreciative, and respectful of us. We don’t miss people who are disrespectful or mean, obviously! The people we miss are the ones who have shown us Christ’s face over the course of our lives.

The people of Ephesus were distraught about letting Paul go because of the things he had done for them. He gave his all to help them know the truth of Christ. Knowing they would never see him again was hard for them to bear, because he had shown them kindness and compassion in a Christ-like manner.

Even we Christians can give in to spiteful words and mean actions at times. We don’t always know the impact we make on people until it’s too late. Let’s be sure we are “missable,” spreading the love of Jesus wherever we go.

DAY 5

Acts 21:1-14

How does one muster up the courage to walk straight into danger? The bravery Paul exhibited in these verses is certainly amazing. He expressed willingness not only to be hurt, but to die in order to represent Christ to Jerusalem. To him, it was worth it. The strength he drew from the Lord gave him courage he would never have had on his own. This mirrors what Christ did for us, knowingly giving up His life so that we could be with Him in eternity. What remarkable, humbling bravery!

While we must avoid danger if possible, sometimes God calls us into unavoidable danger for Him, especially doing things such as foreign missions. We must be willing to call on the strength God gives in order to endure hardships and danger. He will always do what is best for us, and we must trust Him, as Paul did, to do His perfect will.

DEVOTION .012

DAY 1

Acts 21:15-26

How do we react to a new idea? According to Jesus, He came to wipe out the old covenant and make a new one with us. The new covenant made the holiness code of the Old Testament obsolete. When Paul, a Jew, preached that the Jewish law was no longer applicable in the wake of Jesus’ death and resurrection, other Jews were offended. Just like Jesus, Paul was persecuted for teaching a new way of living (Acts 15:6-11; Rom. 3:21-31, and so forth). The new covenant broke the boundaries between Jew and Gentile, slave and free.

When we hear a new or different idea, one that differs from what we’ve always known, do we balk and immediately reject it, as many “righteous” Jews did during Jesus’ life and Paul’s ministry, or do we listen for truth in it? In my experience, God shows us truth in some very unexpected places. Obviously, we should not accept every idea that comes our way; but open-mindedness is not something Jesus condemned. He came to open our hearts to something *new*, redemption through His blood.

DAY 2

Acts 21:27-36

Is being a Christian easy? When you live in America, it usually is. Sure, there are times when we are ridiculed for our faith, but this country is generally a safe place to be a Christian, because over 2000 years after the death of Christ, Christianity is an established, respected religion.

When Paul began his ministry, this new faith was seen as total heresy. There might be places you travel in your life where this is also true for you. While a lot of us can't really imagine truly being persecuted for righteousness' sake, there are places where it happens every day. If we get into a situation where it's not safe to be a Christian, will we back down, or, like Paul, will we take the brunt of other people's anger, suspicion, or spite?

Jesus did not promise us an easy go of it. In fact, in Matthew 10 He warned that it would *not* be easy. We can choose to react like Paul, or not. That's where the gift of free will comes in. Let's strive to act as Paul did.

DAY 3

Acts 21:37–22:21

How can our testimonies be a defense? In the wake of persecution, Paul chose to share the story of how Christ appeared to him when he was persecuting Christians. Paul's testimony is one of my favorite stories in the Bible, and it's definitely an extraordinary one. It's a powerful story of redemption, a shining example of Christ saving us while we were still sinners.

If we're ever in a situation like Paul's, whether life-threatening or innocent questioning, one of the most powerful defenses we have is our testimony. Everyone's story of being set free by Christ is worth hearing about, because the transformation from lost to found is always amazing. It might not work with the people you are telling it to, but it's a strong tool, and one Paul used in this particular situation of being persecuted.

DAY 4

Acts 22:22-30

How do we find a way out? I've always appreciated how the "Exit" signs in England simply say "Way Out." They are much more direct and to the point, in my eyes. Sometimes, when we're in a dangerous, awkward, or pressured situation, we are provided with a "way out," as Paul was in this passage. By calling attention to his Roman citizenship, Paul was able to avoid danger, at least for the moment.

God often provides ways for us to avoid dangerous and questionable situations. Just when the crowd was shouting for Paul's death, he had the opportunity to bring up the fact that he was born a Roman. What a fantastic "way out" he was provided. Let's recognize and be thankful for those times God gives us a "way out."

DAY 5

Acts 23:1-35

How far can integrity take you? Believe it or not, even in these desperate times, integrity is recognized and respected. Paul's integrity and refusal to back down in this passage caused some to protect him and some to plot against him. Because Paul told the truth and

didn't change his story when threatened, the Pharisees believed him and even began defending him against the Sadducees. God had plans for Paul to testify for Him in Rome, and no harm was going to come to him, despite the more than 40 men plotting to kill him.

When we are under God's protection, His plan will always prevail. Whatever the plan is, we must fulfill our calling with integrity. Whether you are called to ministry, missions, teaching, performing, building, or something else, the work we do must be done with integrity. (Read more about integrity in 1 Kings 9:4, Job 2:3, and Prov. 29:10.) By living with integrity, we embody the strength and truth God has bestowed on us.

DEVOTION .013

DAY 1

Acts 24

Paul was kind of like the kid in debate class who knew the best way of winning any argument. The prosecutor, Tertullus, complimented the judge, so Paul complimented the judge. Paul did everything exactly right, but when it came time for the conventional prisoner or defendant to bend the rules and offer a bribe, Paul didn't waiver against this temptation. I often feel if I have not persuaded someone to see my side of an argument instantly, I have failed. But Paul did not give in to what may have felt like failure. Felix kept Paul in prison for two years. Two years! Today people serve less than two years for confessing to certain crimes. But Paul did not give an inch.

The lesson to be taken from Paul's example is his juxtaposition of culture and truth. Paul was undeniably clever, and it probably would have been natural for him to be shrewd and bend the rules. But he did not. Paul held unswervingly to the faith he professed, a lesson we can all take into our daily lives. The fact that Paul could have won his freedom with a little shady behavior, but instead chose obedience to the laws of God, is nothing short of extraordinary.

DAY 2

Acts 25:1-12

Again we see Paul under attack from all angles. Sometimes the Bible's description of legal proceedings and doctrine is hard to comprehend and muddies the epic nature of what is being recounted. What we see in this passage is that Paul was blessed with both the ability to realize when he was being bullied and the courage not to let it continue. The Jewish leaders tried to trap Paul by asking him a question he would quarrel with, in the hopes that Paul would say something to discredit his testimony. Instead, Paul remained true to his profession.

How often are we caught in a situation in which it is easy to make excuses for not following the gospel? If Paul ever had human justification for making concessions to his statement, this would be that time. But he did not. If Paul could stand up to the fury of the Roman Empire, then surely we can stand firm against the opposition we face daily.

DAY 3

Acts 25:13-22

Sometimes I find it easy to become frustrated or upset with God when I do not see tangible results in my life. When I have bad days, I ask God why I wasn't joyful or

peaceful that day. Was I not a good enough person? Here we see King Agrippa and Felix consulting and how God guided their conversation. It would have been easy and not altogether improbable for Festus to have Paul killed just to please the Jews. But God guided Festus, who was fair and just in this situation, and when Paul requested to appeal, Felix dealt with it justly. God used Paul to spread the gospel on a platform that few others would dare attempt. As a result, both Festus and Agrippa were impacted for the better.

We have to remember that in our daily lives, the majority of what God does for us will not be fully realized until much later. I find this incredibly frustrating as I am a results-oriented person, but nonetheless, I try daily to entrust my life to God. If we continue to follow this example, not only will our lives turn out better, but so will the lives of people around us.

DAY 4

Acts 25:23-27

Have you seen those commercials that show one person doing a good thing and then show a chain reaction of good? This is a lot like what we see happening with Paul. While it would have been within the rights of Festus to simply give the people what they wanted by killing Paul, he had been so positively impacted by hearing the gospel that he could not be unfair.

Except instead of helping people pick up the fruit they dropped, we have the opportunity to share eternal truth with them. How much could we improve someone's day if instead of just picking up the cantaloupe they dropped at the store, we also took the time to be Jesus to them in a difficult time? Obviously we should take part in random acts of kindness every day, but we must remember that as Christians we are called to be examples all the time. Let us lead by example.

DAY 5

Acts 26

The way Paul defended himself wasn't really a defense at all. It is like asking for scrambled eggs and getting a biography of the chicken from which the egg came. Instead of taking the chance to provide a concrete account of his deeds and how there was no wrong in them, Paul provided an account of his conversion story, which he knew that both the king and Festus would find moving. When asked if he expected the king to convert to Christianity in such a short time, Paul's response was truly poignant. Paul reminded the king that he was still happy with his faith and would not have traded the actions that had landed him in chains for anything in the world. He complimented both the king and Festus profusely and sought to make sure that they did not feel attacked.

We must remember that the purpose of the gospel is to build up people. Humans are creatures of habit, and the more something is a positive experience, the more people will want to be a part of it. Let us make Christianity a positive experience for everyone we encounter.

DEVOTION .014

DAY 1

Acts 27:1-12

In this passage Luke shifted his account from an omniscient third-person narration to first-person, because he became a member of Paul's traveling party. What would it have been like to be with Paul on his way to make his appeal to Caesar? Even as they sailed toward Rome, things seemed to be working against them. The weather wouldn't cooperate, and nobody listened to Paul when he provided a warning of the devastating course that was ahead.

Sometimes I buy into the idea that bad things happen to me because I haven't been good enough. Then I see Paul, who tried more than most people ever will to live by the Word of God, and he couldn't even get to Rome on time. We must realize that God will allow troubles into your life, and how we deal with them determines the person we are becoming.

DAY 2

Acts 27:13-26

My youth minister used to say, "If you aren't in a storm right now, chances are you just got out of one or one is headed your way." When you think about it, there is always something new that can go wrong. I work at a technology lab on campus, and when I started, the room was disorganized and I was unsure of which things worked and which things didn't. At least five times in my first two weeks I said, "If I can just get this one thing to work, then everything will be ready to go."

Paul's fortitude serves as an excellent reminder that as much as we try to do the right thing, we will have tough times. Paul was so in tune with God that he sent a vision to prevent one disaster, but another disaster occurred in the meantime. The important part of this story is that Paul never gave up—not on God and not on the men traveling with him. Paul remained faithful to the task set before him and embraced all people lovingly.

As we live out our daily lives, let us strive to be hopeful and loving in all situations.

DAY 3

Acts 27:27-44

We again join Paul in his tumultuous trip to Rome. The most incredible thing about how Paul handled himself was his relentless commitment to the principles set forth for him.

So many times, in moments of trouble or hardship, I find that my mind lapses and I take control of my situation instead of handing things over to God. Paul had the incredible focus and perseverance not to commit this error, even amidst shipwreck and guards who wanted to kill him. Luke presented Paul's example almost like a charge to us. It was as if he was trying to show us that a flawed man can endure great hardship, and the love and power of Christ can still shine through.

As we simply go to school and attempt to live our everyday lives, let's remember the forward thinking of Paul and make our decisions based on what God would want from us.

DAY 4

Acts 28:1-10

My family really likes to take adventure vacations. One time we were kayaking on a river in Southern Canada and we came to a difficult turn. My then-11-year-old sister and I were in the same kayak, and our guide told us we could either try the bend or walk around it. It was tricky because a tree had fallen down on one end, and if your life vest got stuck in it you were in a heap of trouble. Long story short—we made it through, and for the rest of that day and the trip we felt compelled to try new things because we were brought closer together.

I think God used Paul in a similar way in this story. Paul was up against incredible odds on the ship, but he stuck with God and came out on top. As a result, Paul had renewed energy and was willing to take on everything from a viper to potentially hostile natives. This is a good reminder to us that we grow closest to God through our trials.

DAY 5

Acts 28:11-31

In the conclusion to Paul's third missionary journey, we see that he once again had the strength and fervor to see through the task appointed to him. I often fall victim to this problem that Paul avoided. I often feel like since I am studying the Bible and trying to understand what God is about, I am not yet ready to share His truth with people. But Paul showed us that even in times of waiting and preparation, we must not forsake our main purpose for want of a better day. Paul realized that while he was waiting to be brought before the court he had as equal a ministry opportunity as he did during the actual trial.

Paul seized each aspect of his situation for the glory of God. What if we could do that in our everyday lives? I am sure that a kind word is needed by many of the people I see every day on campus, but nine times out of ten I prefer not to break stride. Let us take every situation captive for the good news of Christ.