



collegiate+

Online Devotions for Winter 2006/07 Issue

Devotions December 2006

The devotions for December were written by Heather Hagood Bruce and Sara Simpkins.

Raised in Ocala, Florida, Heather Hagood Bruce is a journalism graduate of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. She lives in Memphis with her new husband, Paul, where she works for a firm doing marketing and communications.

Sara Simpkins, from Watertown, Tennessee, is a junior majoring in social work at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee. She enjoys scrapbooking, watching basketball, spending time with her friends, and mission trips. Currently, Sara serves as Missions Coordinator at her BCM (Baptist Collegiate Ministry).

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 Holman Bible Publishers.

DEVOTION .001

Day 1

Hebrews 1:6

I love many things about the Christmas season. I love the warm, fuzzy socks and thick eggnog on cold nights. I love the music and the lights and the smell of fresh gingerbread right from the oven. What I love most of all, however, is reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas. I often try to imagine the night long ago when that tiny Babe came to redeem all of humankind, when He was exalted to the highest place. Can you even begin to imagine a night such as this, when angels worshiped and shepherds bowed—the night Christ was born? In one small child, God revealed Himself to us. I so very often want to shout from the rooftops that He is mine, that He truly is the name above all names.

Day 2

Hebrews 1:10

Over the years, I have had many different opportunities to travel and to see different places and things. One thing I noticed about each of the unique places is how God revealed Himself to me through the creation of the earth. From the glorious mountaintops with snow-covered peaks to the crystal-clear oceans and white sandy beaches, I am always amazed at this beauty. One early morning on vacation, I found myself sitting on the beach with arms and heart outstretched—in total awe of what surrounded me. There are so many countless ways God reveals Himself to us on a daily basis. Sometimes all we need to do is to stop what we are doing and take it in. These are the times in my life when I feel closest to God, when I take that time to really reflect on the works of His hands.

Day 3

Hebrews 2:9-10

The university I attended for four years had a deep understanding of Christ's mission in the world. We were challenged on a daily basis to join in that mission. Many of my friends and a few of my roommates answered the call to foreign missions during our time in school. Their understanding that life comes down to one thing was truly great. Despite the unrest in many regions of the world, these students are answering the call to take up

their cross and follow Christ. It will not be easy. They will leave family and friends to share God's truth with nations and people groups across the globe who have not heard of His love. While they will travel hundreds of miles away to spread the gospel, we have that same opportunity here. Seize the day, my friend, as if it were your last. Even when it is uncomfortable and difficult, remember, Christ is our gain.

Day 4

Hebrews 2:12

I often find myself singing praises to God. Actually, I do it just about everywhere. It's hard not to. For all that He has done, I want to say, "thank you!" He has proven Himself faithful and true in my life. If there was one reason to trust the Word of Christ, it would be that. The Bible is full of truths! Once these truths become apparent in our lives, it is hard to keep quiet. We want to talk about them, sing about them, and shout about them. The Lord is good and His faithfulness continues. What a cause for celebration!

Day 5

Hebrews 2:18

Temptations surround us on a daily basis. We can't flip on the television, buy a magazine, or get in the car without some sort of temptation just waiting to get the best of us. From the day we were born into this world inflicted by sin until the day we die, sin and the effects of a sinful life surround us. Even though this fact sounds depressing, Christ comes to our rescue. While I start my day out in prayer, I often find myself praying throughout the day when I want to do something I know would not be pleasing in the sight of God. I can do nothing on my own accord and my own strength, but by the power of Christ who lives within me, I can do all things. Isn't that a blessing? A hope? In the midst of a dark world filled with depravity, we have someone on our side—One who is just waiting for us to call out to Him.

Devotion .002

Day 1

Hebrews 3:4

I love this verse. It's so simple, yet we need to hear it on a daily basis. It's often easy to forget that God is the "One who built everything." Our generation is one of pure "mine" syndrome. We believe everything to be our own: we worked hard to get this or that or we labored and toiled, and deserve this. Let's remind ourselves that everything we have is from God. What is given to us, then, should be considered a blessing and not something to which we are entitled. Most assuredly, as the Lord has given, He also can take away...in the blink of an eye. Let's be mindful of this in our own lives.

Day 2

Hebrews 3:12-13

When I was in high school, I taught a Bible study for younger girls. One of the girls in that study was unsure of her salvation. She professed Christ as Lord, but she had many doubts and she was vocal about those doubts. She needed encouragement. She needed to hear over and over that one cannot fall out of Christ's eternal love. I committed at that

time to pray daily for her and to encourage her in her walk with Christ. She is a different person today. She stands on a firm foundation, and has a deep and abiding faith in Christ. She needed a bit of encouragement in her walk, and needed to know that walking through valleys in our faith is all part of the journey.

Day 3

Hebrews 3:19

I once watched a talk show on which a guest was describing a time when he was contemplating suicide by jumping off a bridge. He said to himself, “If there is a god, he will save me when I jump.” The man did survive. He now professes to believe in God. Would God still be God if that man with intense unbelief had died upon that jump? Absolutely. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. One cannot put God in a box and wrap it up with a ribbon. “Well, God, if I jump and I die... You’re not the real thing.” That’s nonsense! We must discipline ourselves to believe God for who and what He says He is. Yes, there will be days when we doubt—that’s human nature. We must persevere in this journey. Christ follower, believe!

Day 4

Hebrews 4:11

After a long week of exams and running around trying to finish the semester, how does it feel to walk into your room, throw your books on the floor, and crawl into your bed? It’s the ultimate rest, is it not? Weeks of late nights and no sleep...the largest cups of coffee known to humans...red, puffy eyes. The nearest couch or bed could be considered a haven.

In this same way, when we submit to Christ and His authority over us, we experience rest that can come only from Him. Christ promises us this rest in this verse. It’s such a beautiful thing to feel. Conversely, when we are caught up in any type of sin, it can feel all consuming and depleting. Let’s turn that leaf over and say, “No more.” Let’s crave the rest from our Heavenly Father and sleep in peace.

Day 5

Hebrews 4:15-16

Have you ever shown someone grace? After a long semester my freshman year, I was driving home on the interstate and was pulled to the side of the road. Those blue lights were just shining away in my rearview mirror. I’m not sure why, but the police officer that day decided to show me grace. He had every reason to write me a ticket and send me on my way, but after only a warning, he let me go.

When we draw near to Christ, He extends grace to us. He knows we have sins stacked against us: we are to blame. However, He takes that ticket for us and rips it in pieces. What a great God we serve! He hands out this amazing grace to undeserved recipients like you and me.

Devotion .003

Day 1

Hebrews 5:9

When I was a little girl I loved singing the old hymn, “Whiter than Snow.” I loved the symbolism of Christ washing our sins away, so that He would see us whiter than the freshly fallen snow in winter. Isn’t that beautiful? Christ, in all of His perfection, is to be emulated. We are to strive to be more like Christ every single day of our lives. He is the source of our salvation, and because we have this model of perfection to emulate, He challenges us to faithfulness. He challenges us to be more like Himself. It’s a goal—one that I will spend my whole life trying to obtain. Some days are better than others, some days I grow closer, and some days I fall behind. It’s all a process, and a journey—that’s one of my favorite parts about it.

Day 2

Hebrews 5:13-14

I came to Christ when I was seven years old. I came in the essence of child-like faith. I could not comprehend everything in the Bible. I couldn’t wrap my arms around all that God encompassed and meant. I knew only that I wanted Jesus to live within my heart. Spiritual maturity does not happen over night. I have spent many years in Sunday School, Bible studies and youth and college groups. I’ve dug deeper into the Word in my own quiet times to gain more of an understanding of the decision I made so many years ago. Growing in the Lord is not always an easy thing to do. There are mountains and valleys and on occasion, deserts. However, God’s promises ring true and He is my focus—He is my goal. Discovering how to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is a wonderful way to begin the day.

Day 3

Hebrews 6:11-12

I look at these verses the same way I look at an exam. The goal is to make an A in the class, right? OK, you study in the library hours upon end, making note cards and highlighting texts for weeks before you march into the classroom or auditorium confident in your abilities. In the same way, we are to show this same diligence in our pursuit of being Christlike. We have His blessings to gain. Is that not worthy of all we have to offer and give? I think so!

Day 4

Hebrews 6:13-15

Patience is a virtue, is it not? I have heard that phrase my entire life it seems. My mother would often taut me with it when I was younger. I wasn’t the most patient child. However, patience soon becomes perseverance, and a just award is granted in the end if we can just wait it out long enough. Let’s believe God at His Word, despite what happens. Let’s place our faith and trust in God and be patient and wait on the Lord. It is through Him that we inherit the promises.

Day 5

Hebrews 6:19

This verse speaks of the hope that we place in Christ. Despite all that may happen, we still have this hope. College is a time of intense change. Every day brings something new, does it not? I finished a semester fighting a battle with malaria (I got it while overseas on a mission trip). My hope was in Christ. If my hope had been with anyone or anything else, I would not have been able to finish that semester, demanding as it was. I wholeheartedly believed God's promises to my life. I knew He would finish what He had set out to do in my life. I challenge you, in whatever you face in the coming weeks and months, to place your hope in Christ alone.

Devotion .004

Day 1

Psalm 110:1-4; Colossians 3:1

What is an example of something that serves multiple roles? Duct tape can be used to hold things together, but it can be used to make a wallet or even a prom dress. Christ also plays multiple roles; He is both King and Priest. Psalm 110, a Messianic psalm, describes Christ's everlasting priesthood and special place at the right hand of God. Being at the right hand of God speaks of Christ's deity and power.

It's pretty cool that Christ holds those multiple roles and is sitting next to God. But what does that have to do with us? If you are "raised with Christ," you can set your mind on Christ sitting at God's right hand. Having your mind set on Christ above means having an eternal perspective. If you have an eternal perspective, you'll put time and effort into things that will matter forever, like sharing the gospel with your friend or going on a mission trip to tell people about Jesus.

Day 2

John 3:16

During intramural basketball season, I have a ritual. Every night after the games, I go with my friends to the campus diner. The same guy is always behind the counter to take my same order (veggie burger with no cheese, mayo, or onions). Night after night, he makes the same burger for the same person.

As Priest, Christ is the same way. In the Old Testament, priests would come and go as often as one would die and another would be born. Not Christ. He was born once, died one sacrificial death, and rose again. Now He is Priest forever. No one else will take over. Even people born hundreds of years from now will have to rely on Jesus for salvation.

Not only is Christ's priesthood eternal, His work as a priest is for everyone and can never disappear. God loved everyone in the world so much that He sent Jesus. The work of Jesus on the cross provides everlasting life. Nothing, not death or life or angels or demons or depth or height, can separate us from this (Rom. 8:38-39).

Day 3

Leviticus 16:2-3,6,34

Some people avoid reading the Old Testament like it's the plague. They see it as complicated or boring. Some things about the old law are pretty interesting, though. For example, God was present to see His chosen people in a cloud in the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies, was a very special area of the temple. This was where God dwelt. Only certain people could enter this room. In Leviticus, Moses received instructions from God about all the special things Aaron had to do as he entered God's presence in the Most Holy Place. When Aaron went in, once a year, he had to offer a bull for all of Israel's sins.

With this whole, elaborate plan, why did the author consider this weak and unprofitable, and claim that it "made nothing perfect" (Heb. 7:18)? How many people could directly enter God's presence under the old law? The only people allowed to enter God's presence were the high priest or a select few people such as Moses. How many people can enter God's presence now? Anyone who accepts Christ is in the presence of God. Isn't that much stronger, worthwhile, and perfect? We can draw near to God!

Day 4

John 14:6

People are so blessed to be in the presence of God. But how, exactly, do people come into His presence? In the Old Testament, the high priest would enter through a curtain into a special, holy room. How do we do it today?

John gave us a clear, concise answer: Jesus! He's the way for us to get to God, so to speak. Jesus died a sacrificial death. His blood paid for everything wrong we've done and even everything wrong we will do in the future. If we accept this truth and rely on it, we have God right with us. We have access to God. He isn't in a cloud far away from the normal John Doe. He isn't reserved for the intelligent, wealthy, or super-spiritual. God is available through His Son, Jesus Christ. If we're Christian, we can talk to Him, even boldly approach His throne. Do you take advantage of this?

Day 5

1 Timothy 1:15-16

Think about the "worst" sin you've ever committed—the one that makes you feel the guiltiest. It's tempting, in light of your sins, to start thinking about someone else who has done even worse things. If you cheated on a test, you may reason that cheating is not as bad as killing someone.

Many people single out murderers as horrible people beyond the grace of Jesus. For example, some say a serial killer or a terrorist cannot experience God's forgiveness of sins. This point of view goes against the Bible's teaching. Christ will "save those who come" (Heb. 7:25).

Thankfully, Jesus shows mercy to all sinners, including you and me. Anyone can believe in Jesus and receive eternal life from Him. He can forgive us, whether we lie, gossip, or murder. This grace is monumental and should motivate us to share Christ's priesthood with everyone we meet.

Devotion .005

Day 1

Romans 8:33-34

Imagine that someone stole your car. The evidence was overwhelming. Your neighbor saw the crime, and numerous people saw the thief driving the car. When you take the thief to court, there is no trial. The judge has a special meeting with the thief's lawyer. When they come out of the meeting, the thief is free from all charges. What? That's not right! The thief was guilty!

Even though we fall so short of God's glory, no one can bring charges against Christians, not even God Himself. Jesus not only died for us, but also was raised again and seated next to God, where He intercedes for us. He pleads to God on our behalf.

As Christians, we are to thank Jesus for our status as "not condemned." We need to live our lives like we're not condemned. Are you living a "new life," one of no condemnation?

Day 2

Ephesians 2:13

Soon after this writing, I am going to Thailand on a mission trip. The group will fly on at least five different planes. The time difference from Thailand to Tennessee is half of a day—about 12 hours. That is far, far away—much further than I've ever been before. People who aren't yet Christians are far away, just like I will be on my mission trip. When I am on my trip, I will be far from home—Tennessee. Nonbelievers are far away from a different home—fellowship with God.

Just as my long plane ride will bring me home, people who decide to trust in Christ come home to God. They are brought near to God through blood. At first, that might sound kind of weird. But blood is what God required. It's the proof of death and of sacrifice. In the old covenant, God required sacrifices of the blood of various animals of His choosing. When Christ died on the cross in the new covenant, He shed His blood to buy us back. His blood is our plane ride home to God. Through His blood we are brought near.

Day 3

Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 4:10

Most college students hate doing laundry. If you're lucky, you can bring your dirty clothes home for your mom to wash over the weekend. If not, you're stuck in the campus laundry room trying to get out the grass stains from kicking a soccer ball a few days before. It takes time for you to learn what products remove which stains in your clothes. Eventually, you get the hang of it.

The stains of sin can be cleaned off with the blood of our Priest, Christ. When Jesus takes care of your sins, you are enabled to serve God. Everyone who has received God's grace is given gifts to minister to each other and to glorify God. If Jesus has removed your stains, are you using your gifts to serve our living God?

Day 4

Romans 6:23

One of my friends is very blessed. When his grandmother died, she left him an inheritance that would pay for all his schooling. While everyone else I know was worrying about scholarships, loans, and rent, he knew he could go to college and pursue the graphic design degree he wanted. It's unfortunate that his grandmother had to die for him to get this gift, but it is an amazing gift being passed down to him!

We can't really envy my friend too much, though. We've been given an even better inheritance gift from our Heavenly Father—eternal life! Because Christ died for sinners like us, we can live forever. Without this gift, we will die in our sins. However, we can have life forever if we trust in Christ, the One who gives “the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

Day 5

1 Corinthians 1:9

Fellowship. If your church is anything like mine, that word evokes happy feelings of a huge potluck “fellowship dinner” in the church basement where everyone talks for hours and eats fried chicken, mashed potatoes, seven-layer salads, cakes, and anything else you can think of.

Interestingly enough, the term *fellowship* is used in the Bible to describe our relationship with Christ. If you accept Christ, you are called into fellowship with Him by God. What exactly does this fellowship involve? Does it mean you call Christ and invite Him to your local buffet?

Fellowship with Christ means you know and accept Him. Then you spend time with Him, whether you are reading your Bible, praying, or singing praises in a church service. This is the only way to develop a relationship with Him. You talk to Him and listen to Him, just like you would anyone else you want to get to know. You become more like Him. You develop a common interest with Christ. Where are you in fellowship with Christ?

January 2007

The devotions for January were written by Kayleigh Lewerenz and Samantha Krieger.

Kayleigh Lewerenz, originally from a small town in Minnesota (Litchfield), a sophomore at Arizona State University majoring in graphic design. She loves women's retreats, hiking, reading, painting, and good concerts! Her plan after college: ADVENTURE!

Samantha Krieger is a recent graduate from Liberty Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she received her Masters of Arts in Religion. She works in her local church, creates discipleship programs, and wants to begin a women's ministry in the future. On the side, she writes for various student magazines and enjoys the Bible, running, soccer, traveling, Spanish, and being her husband Jeremiah's number-one fan!

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 Holman Bible Publishers.

Devotion .001

Day 1

Leviticus 5:8-10

Jesus is both our Priest and Lamb. He shed His blood as a sacrifice for our sins, and intercedes for us to God. Blood of innocence is required of God to pardon evil; this justifies those who commit evil and cleanses them so that in the eyes of the Lord they are completely without blame. This has not changed; it is not just some "Old Testament" ritual, but continues even now. We are held accountable for every sin we commit, and we are doomed. God, knowing our doomed position, provided a Lamb: Jesus. God, knowing our doomed position, provided a way out for us, a way to cancel our sin, to pardon us from our punishment. He loves us and does not want us to reap the judgment we sow with iniquity. He gave us Jesus. We no longer need the blood of an unblemished animal, which was used by Moses, but the blood of the unblemished Divine Lamb. God came to earth to offer His righteous blood on our behalf, to demonstrate His own justice. What marvelous love the Lord has for sinners!

Day 2

Exodus 21:23-25

God taught the Israelites about justice and how to have a just society. Today we also demand justice. What do we think when we see children in an abusive home or starving on the streets? What about when people are harshly mistreated amongst family members? Do we not want justice served for their wrong acts? We know God is unchanging (Jas. 2:17) and demands justice among people. Are we to fear the harvest of iniquity that our past and present sins sow? By the grace of God, no! Jesus bore our sins. The judgment has not changed, eye for an eye, but we have a Savior. Jesus took our punishment. You say, "I have never murdered, I have never stolen, I have never beaten." But I say, "Do not think of sin as something to be taken lightly." All sin is severe—so severe it is worthy of death. Jesus saved us from death. He was sent by God to personally take the punishment of our individual verdict, which changes from death to life for those who trust Christ.

Day 3

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We will meet our Lord face to face, and He will gather us together and take us into paradise to be with Him forever. This is the hope we hold onto. Just as He saved the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, He will take us from this wicked world of sin and death. This world is hard. Evil presides at every corner and sometimes the despair and temptations seem unbearable. But hold onto your faith, brothers and sisters, for there is an eternal reward that our hearts and minds cannot fathom. Great is the reward for those who finish the race! Our Lord is not slow in keeping His promises, but will return one day to gather us in His arms to reap a harvest of righteousness. At the blink of an eye, we shall be in the safety of Jesus from judgment and be brought to our true home.

Day 4

Galatians 5:7-9,16-18

The world calls us away from Christ. Every day we face distractions, a subtle call to doubt, or to take on a different path. Take heart! Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. The Lord knows our hearts and our minds deeply; there is no concealing our feelings. What has turned us aside today, or this week, or even this year? What makes us look away from Christ and on to something else? Is it money, relationships, selfishness, worries, sickness, the world? Just as David faced his giant, so you too must face your giant, but only do so with the strength from the Lord. When we turn our eyes to something else, we must confess to our Lord and turn back to Him with a whole heart, walking in the Spirit He gave to us so we may know the way in which to go.

Day 5

Hebrews 9:24-28

Why did God want atonement for us? Why was God willing to give up His own Son for our sakes, so we would not be held guilty? God came down to earth to satisfy His own justice. The love of our Father is immeasurable. Jesus bore the sins of the world. He was able to do this and to be the ultimate sacrifice for humanity. What power Jesus has! There is nothing more or less that we can do to obtain salvation. Jesus brought it to us on the cross, and in rising from the dead, demonstrated His power to do such a task—the forgiveness of many sins throughout many generations. Today, think on the love we have from our Lord to lay down His life and to redeem us. Think how our greatest sins are forgiven, completely having been cancelled on the cross.

Devotion .002

Day 1

1 Peter 1:6-8

When times get difficult and you feel far from God, know that your faith has great reward and is of precious value. The Lord will reward you and will not let you endure hardship without His grace. Stay in the faith and in the grace God gives you to get through it. Learn from God's faithfulness as you look back on His promises in your life and the lives of others and embrace His Word, knowing that He will keep His promises. One way to be diligent is to look ahead. Do not to focus on the here and now, but look at your eternal

reward, and the future you have with Jesus. What are the promises God gives to His people? What things can we look forward to? What good things do you see through hardships and suffering? Take hold of the faith, knowing that it is through this very faith you were saved by grace in Jesus Christ!

Day 2

Matthew 8:23-27

So you get in the boat with Jesus. You are ready to live out His great commandment, commission, and mandate. You are so pumped and ready to be a Christian! You are loving God and loving other people. But then, the waves come. Trouble and fear sear your faith. Take heart! All authority has been given to Jesus and He will not let even a hair of your head perish. Today, focus on following hard after Jesus, trusting Him to control the wind and the waves. He is your shield and your protection; we are to be lights of the world, letting nothing hinder us. Have faith that God wants only what is best for you, knowing that He is wise in where He takes you in life. Do not let doubt put out your light or your joy, which greatly will influence people as they see the life of Jesus in your life.

Day 3

Genesis 22:6-8

The Lord tests us to refine us as gold, and to strengthen us. He tested Abraham who proved faithful. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son, the son that God had promised; yet Abraham did so willingly because he had faith in the Lord's wisdom, strength, and power. God calls us to die to ourselves so we may gain life. We must sacrifice all for the Lord because He is worthy of everything we are—our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our strength. We can see that the Lord proved faithful to Abraham just as He will prove faithful to us in all matters of our lives. Abraham can be used in our daily lives as an example of obedience to God and to trust in Him with all faith that His decisions for our lives are good, and pure, and wise. Today, give to God what you may have been holding back from Him. Do so with faith! The Lord loves you!

Day 4

Matthew 25:27-29

What power we have in Jesus according to our faith! Think of the prayers given up to God in faith for the unbelievers in our world: people at work, those in class, our roommates! It's a marvelous interaction between God and His precious creations! Pray always in faith, and you can expect Him to do whatever you ask according to the Lord's will for the glory of God. We are not stopped by anything or anyone with our faith.

Once my roommate was going away for the weekend—a weekend we had bills to pay. I would be paying the bills that weekend she would be gone. But my roommate did not have faith in me that I would be responsible about it. She wrote me all the detailed instructions to pay it, then called me to be sure I would follow through. It was a nice gesture, but the thing is, I had never failed to pay the bills before! I was always on time with them and could be counted on to pay them. I realized this is how God must feel when we don't trust Him. We try to work everything out our way to be sure things are

going to be accomplished on time, and we go through every step to be sure that He comes through for us; so that the bills get paid!

Day 5

Genesis 7:1-5

Noah had great faith! Think of what could have been the situation for him. He had to build this boat, and spend time and resources on this, while people probably thought he was crazy and mocked him for being so foolish. What would people say to you if you were building a very large boat and putting many pairs of animals on it? Noah pressed on and continued building the boat and gathering animals. God proved faithful. He brought the rains and saved Noah and his family.

What are some circumstances in which you are criticized for your faith in Jesus? How do you react to them? Press on and continue to pursue Jesus and the kingdom of God as we are commanded to do. Tell people everywhere of the love of Christ. Know that it is not the honor of others we seek, but the Lord's. He will bring the Lord's honor to pass.

Devotion .003

Day 1

1 Thessalonians 5:8

As Christ followers, we're not called to sulk in the darkness, rather we're to radiate in the day as "sons of light" (1 Thess. 5:5). Therefore, we must be alert and clear-minded in the hour in which we live. There are people who'd love to destroy our faith, love, and even salvation. What they don't understand is that they'll never have the power to do such a thing. As true believers in Christ, our armor of faith and love should be evident to all who come in contact with us. The faith on our armor shows that we're confident and persuaded in the divine truth that Jesus is God and is the only means to salvation for all humankind. Our armor shows that we obtain constancy in our profession of faith and will not back up or let out. But even more so, our faith must be followed by love because faith without works is dead and in faith and hope, the greatest is love. Love must be publicized everywhere we venture in life, even in confronting the darkness. Naturally as we place our faith in God, love is what will change our lives and will change how we view people. Is your life characteristic of not only faith, but also a deep love for God and others?

Day 2

Hebrews 12: 1-2

Dr. Jerry Falwell, my chancellor in college and seminary, is a man I know personally and have a great respect for primarily because of his faith. God gave Dr. Falwell the dream of building a Christian university to raise up students to be champions for Christ. He had the faith that God would bring about this dream. Sure enough, Dr. Falwell's faith came to fruition. Liberty University was founded in 1971 and is known for being the largest and most exciting Christian university in the world, where countless lives are being changed. To this day, Dr. Falwell's faith has enabled him to accomplish above and beyond what any man could accomplish on his own. His faith in God is what distinguishes him from many other successful visionaries today.

In Scripture, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David are some examples of men of great faith as well. These men persevered in their faith and were convinced of things that had not yet been fulfilled. We often look for people of great faith in God and grow discouraged when they seem to be non-existent. God's desire is that we'll be motivated to persist in our faith just like the men and women of faith who have gone before us. He wants you to become that person of great faith.

Day 3

Hebrews 12:7,10-11

“This is hurting me much more than it hurts you! I'm doing this because I love you!” As a child, these words were often spoken into my ears (I'm sure you can relate). Well, now I'm older and finally understand this phrase. My parents' discipline at the time seemed painful and something I detested, but now I look back and I'm nothing but thankful. Their discipline was for the good and helped me become a person of discipline and responsibility. In a similar manner, God's discipline in our lives is for our good. He disciplines those He loves so we may share in His holiness. Discipline produces holiness and builds character.

Discipline can be from God to produce character but also to judge sin. In our culture, God sees people rejecting Him and adhering to a permissive lifestyle of sin. He does not tolerate sin but will punish it in due time. If you feel discouraged by sin in our culture, remember that God always deals justly with sin. His purpose for disciplining sin in your own life is that you will strengthen the weak areas in your life. Altogether, God's discipline is for people to fix their eyes on Him. The next time you feel you're experiencing God's discipline, don't become bitter or resentful toward the pain of it. Recognize there is a purpose in discipline and know it will make you stronger.

Day 4

Song of Solomon 2:7

Often, I'll run into young women my age who have decided to live with their boyfriends before marriage. I always think to myself, “They're really missing out.” I don't think this to be critical or judgmental—I'm just burdened that they're not adhering to God's ideal to abstain from sex until marriage. In addition, this impatience or unwillingness to adhere to God's provision in marriage deprives couples the excitement of starting a new life together after the wedding.

Abstaining from sex before marriage and guarding physical purity is much more than just an option. God has designed this standard for one's protection and greater pleasure. With God, especially in our physical relationships, good things come in time. Timing is everything. God speaks, “Do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time.” Our sexuality is tied to our holiness because if we're unclean before God, we'll be unable to hear from Him. Sin will block our sensitivity to His voice and will cause distance.

Let Scripture be an encouragement and warning to you not to light the match or “stir up” love until marriage. Maybe you're not cohabitating or having sex, but you're in a serious relationship. Set serious boundaries for your purity in touching, kissing, temptations for heavy petting, or in any weaknesses in your relationship. Be extra cautious when you're alone—perhaps don't be alone at all. The reality is that God has

wonderfully designed you as a sexual being—an aspect meant for after you say “I do” to a lifetime of commitment to your spouse. You’ll never regret having abstained until the wedding night.

Day 5

Acts 4:32

I grew up in South Carolina and lived in a neighborhood where everyone was unified and cared for each other in a unique, rare way. I could ride my bike, knock on a neighbor’s door, and instantly be handed homemade cookies and milk. Hospitality was so frequent that I often just expected it! Neighbors’ doors were always open, and they’d say and act out: “Whatever is mine is yours.” This kind of hospitality continued until my family and I moved away. I’ll never forget the impact it had on us.

As Christians, we should make it our aim to determine ways in which we can serve others, showing mercy and kindness. One way in we can do that is by simply opening up our home, apartment, or dorm room to others. We can invite others into our world with the goal of serving them. The Word says we should be hospitable even toward strangers we meet (of course, having discretion with strangers). We should be quick to provide a loving and comfortable environment for them, trying to meet our guests’ needs, and be genuinely interested in them. Not only are we to be hospitable within the home, but hospitable toward people in every encounter of life. Perhaps it’s time to roll the cookie dough!

Devotion .004

Day 1

Exodus 16:7-8

When God used Moses to part the Red Sea, the people of Israel were able to safely escape the Egyptians and cross over to new land. God saved them from tremendous oppression just as He’d promised. After this great deliverance, they were led into the wilderness and began to grumble and complain: “What shall we drink? Why are we wandering?”

The children of Israel are a perfect example of how people act when they live by the flesh. When we don’t get what we want, we complain and get out of sorts. Even after God has done a great miracle and answered our prayer, we return to doubting and our hearts refuse to trust. When these natural responses occur, we must rely on God’s truth. A complaining spirit is of the flesh, not the Spirit, and Christ tells us to walk in the Spirit. When we walk in the Spirit, we know that God is our Provider. Even if it takes waiting, He always answers our prayers. Remember what He has done in the past so you’ll be encouraged to have faith in the present and future. When you’re faced with the temptation to complain, first ask yourself: “What will I gain through complaining? Is my complaint against the Lord? What can I gain through this experience that is positive?” Commit to change your attitude of complaining into a spirit of thankfulness.

Day 2

James 1:12

All over the world, Christians are under trial. Some are being killed for their faith, or persecuted at work. Others may suffer from the death of a loved one, or feel defeated from life's pressures. Whatever degree of the trial, God's plan is for all of us to grow and look more like His image. As a rubberband can stretch wider and wider, yet is still able to return to its original loop, God will stretch us to the limit, while simultaneously encouraging and comforting us. He'll never allow us to snap or place pressure on us that we cannot handle. A great indication of our character is how we handle the struggles that sweep into our life.

In the past, have trials made you bitter or helped you become better through persevering? God says, "Blessed" (or happy) is the man or woman who perseveres under trial. James 1:4 states, "But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." Trust that God loves you, is carrying you, and will bless your endurance and faithfulness in due time.

Day 3

Proverbs 26:8; 16:16; 21:21; 28:26

Picture this. You're walking down the street and a man screams out of a window at the top of his lungs: "Hey! Yes, I'm talking to you! I know you can be naïve and foolish, and I want to warn you—discern prudence and discern wisdom in your life! Cry out for it! I warn you! Cry out for wisdom!"

Strangely enough, this is how I picture the urgency that is invoked in these verses. If the writer could literally shout out from the pages of Proverbs into our hearts, he most certainly would want us to see the need for wisdom in our lives. Discarding wisdom could cost your whole life. There is a necessity to cry out to God for wisdom because wisdom is not from people, but from God. We cannot discern wisdom in our own strength. God says to ask for wisdom without doubting and you'll receive it generously. Are you applying wisdom to your heart and embracing it with all you have? Keep along the path of wisdom, and your life will continue to abound in fruit. Keep along the path of foolishness and your life will be destructive.

Contrasting *Wisdom* and *Foolishness*:

Wisdom

Help others with good advice

Enjoy wisdom

Cautious with reason

Seek knowledge

Value wisdom above riches

Receive life

Respond to correction

Pursue wisdom

Profit from correction

Trust in wisdom

Control anger

Admired as counselors
Rewarded with knowledge
Keep peace
Stay on straight paths
Avoid wicked paths
Have great advice

Foolishness

Lack judgment
Enjoy foolishness
Gullible
Avoid the wise
Feed on foolishness
Receive punishment
Respond to punishment
Pursue illusive dreams
An example to others (proud)
Trust in self
Unleash anger
Beaten as servant
Inherit folly
Stir up anger
Go in the wrong way
Walk a troublesome path
Will never be chosen as counselor

Day 4

Psalm 119

When we are faced with difficulties in life, we need God's instruction to guide us through. Developing a plan for daily interaction in God's Word is crucial because God speaks to us and shows us His wisdom through Scripture. Disciplining ourselves to spend time in the Word must be the first priority of the day. No matter how busy we are with papers, projects, friends, and activities, God must be above all that. If it takes waking up an hour before your regular time, do it! He will bless you and honor you for seeking Him first.

If you aren't a morning person, develop a regular time to meet with Him in the daytime or evening. The key is that you feed your heart with truth every day so you're able to stand against the temptations that are tied to trials. Humble yourself before the Lord and receive His counsel and instruction and you will walk in the right way. If you fail to be in the Word regularly, you'll become weaker, more discouraged, and more prone to sin. Examine yourself. What are your habits in prayer and in study of the Word? Ask God to help you improve your priorities, and He'll give you a greater desire and delight for His instruction. As the psalmist says, "How happy are those whose way is blameless, who live according to the law of the Lord!" (Ps. 119:1).

Day 5

James 1:21

It is one thing to read God's Word and another to meditate on it, chew it up, and digest it. One way in which we hide God's Word in our hearts is to let it become a part of who we are. This action requires that we pause in our quiet time when we need to reflect, being still and patient, and hear the Holy Spirit to speak to us. As we read, we may ask questions like, "How is this verse used in context? What is God saying to me in this verse? How can I apply these words to everyday life?" When we hide His Word in our heart, we're less prone to sin against God. His perfect instruction is on our hearts rather than the lies of this world.

Praying God's Word is another way to hide His Word in our hearts. For example, if we're struggling with our thought life, we can pray to God Philippians 4:8: "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things." Praying God's Word gets you focused on God and helps you dwell on what is true. Allow Scripture to change you as you meditate and memorize the words of God. Put away all the wickedness of your heart. In humility, receive the Word.

February 2007

The devotions for February were written by LaShondra Jones and Alaina Kraus.

LaShondra Jones was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, and a graduate of Cienega High. She is a junior at the University of Arizona where she's involved in the Christian Challenge student ministry.

Alaina Kraus is a post-graduate student at Oakland University, continuing her studies in theatre. Originally from Lake Orion, Michigan, she hopes to continue working in the performing arts as a costume designer as well as a performer and eventually help set up an urban art outreach.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 Holman Bible Publishers.

Devotion .001

Day 1

James 2:1-4; 1 John 4:18

Favoritism comes in many different forms. While it may not always be as obvious as favoring someone with an affluent lifestyle over someone of lower economic status, we're all guilty of it at times. It may come in the form of sitting or talking with only our close friends during church, while shutting out all others, whether purposefully or inadvertently. Favoritism also could be not reaching out to or befriending those different from us ethnically or culturally.

Proverbs 18:24 speaks of "a friend who stays closer than a brother." Who's to say that friend isn't that shy person in the corner before worship, waiting for someone to approach him or her? As someone who's been on both sides of the fence, I realize that it can be just as difficult to be the one to reach out. However, this is when it is important to remember that perfect love drives out fear, whether it is fear of rejection or fear reaching out to someone you don't know. Here is where we learn to dwell in this love.

Day 2

Matthew 5:3; 11:3-6

Christ teaches in Matthew 5:3 that those who are poor in spirit are those whom God has chosen to inherit His kingdom. Are we speaking about Jesus with only those whom we know are already believers? By the same token, do we constantly surround ourselves with only other believers or do we seek to open up our circle of friends to include those who need Christ?

In Matthew 11:3-6, John asked Jesus a question that, at first, I found somewhat amusing. Because of all John had heard Jesus was doing, he asked if He (Jesus) was the one He'd been prophesying about, or should he expect someone else? Upon reading this over a couple times, I understood it to be a very pertinent question that people today are asking, "Is Jesus what I've been looking for, or should I expect money or a relationship to fulfill me?" As ambassadors of Christ, we are to show through our lives the answer Jesus gave to John through His witness of healing, raising the dead, and preaching good news for the poor—"Yes, I am He that you seek."

Day 3

Mark 12:31; Romans 8:12; Corinthians 5:17

As Christians, many of us know that we are called to “love our neighbors as ourselves,” but do we even love ourselves the way we should? In order to truly love ourselves, we need to see ourselves as God sees us. God’s Word says we are “new creations in Christ” and there is “no condemnation” of those in Christ. Living the life Jesus calls us to live is based on walking daily in these truths and the mercies God provides for us anew every day.

Many times I catch myself constantly falling back into the same thought patterns of dwelling on past mistakes I’ve made. They could be thinking about opportunities in which I failed to share Jesus with people, or constantly worrying about every little thing I’ve said that could have been misinterpreted by someone. I’m reminded that God desires for us to press forward in obedience to Him, not lag behind in the mire of our failures.

Day 4

Matthew 9:20-22,27-29; James 2:19

I’m sure many, if not all, of us have read these passages and know their premise to be, “Faith without deeds is dead.” In other words, if you profess to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, you need to back up your words with actions. I believe this is absolutely true. However, I believe we first should answer the question James posed: “What kind of faith do we have?” Is it the kind that not only uses actions to back words, but also saves us through Christ, or is it hollow, based only on whatever “god” we are comfortable in believing in? Jesus had a lot to say about faith, most of it when people were being healed.

In Matthew 9 Jesus told the woman with the issue of blood that her faith had healed her. He also restored the sight of two blind men, noting it was according to their faith that they had received their sight. Does your faith reflect mere head knowledge of a spiritual concept or an incredible relationship with a faithful, powerful God of whom we are ambassadors?

Day 5

Proverbs 3:4-6; Hebrews 11:7; 17-19

The Bible describes many men and women of faith. Abraham trusted God so much that he would have sacrificed his only son, promised to him by God and born to him in his old age. But an angel of the Lord stopped him. Noah built an ark large enough to fit his family and two of each animal on the earth.

Faith: we all know we should have it, but just what is it? Faith is taking God at His Word and stepping out on His promises to do what He has spoken. In order to do this, we must first believe that God is who He says He is—the one true God. Then submit our lives to Him, knowing and trusting that His plans are better than our own.

Devotion .002

Day 1

Jeremiah 33:3; Ephesians 4:11-13; James 3:1-2

God's Word tells us that Christ called some to be pastors, some evangelists, and some, among other things, teachers. As teachers, we are called to be leaders, taking responsibility for what we instruct others to do, whether verbally or non-verbally. We know that none of us are perfect, every one of us stumbles and falls far short of God's glory. So how is it that we can be faithful teachers of the things of God without misleading others?

The answer, though we may have heard it many times before, is to seek God. This can be through prayer, reading the Word daily and just pouring our hearts out to Him, and being honest about our failures, successes, and struggles. This doesn't mean we will always be perfect role models and never make mistakes. It means that after we fall, we can point those others to the Greatest Teacher, Jesus. He set the ultimate example of love through His sacrifice on the cross for our sins so we could have life eternally and most abundantly.

Day 2

Matthew 15:17-19; 2 Corinthians 10:5

Christ taught us that from the wellsprings of our hearts come the words of our mouths. In other words, what we ponder eventually comes out in our speech. Before we think about watching what we say, we should ask ourselves, "Am I listening to what I think?" This is probably the most difficult area in my walk with God because I like to let my mind wander and daydream, rather than actively take control of my thought life.

The Word tells us if we don't take our thoughts captive to Christ, then our thoughts will take us captive—first in our minds, then in our words, then in our actions. Our thoughts destructively manifest themselves in our lives in various forms such as gossip. We can stop this harmful domino effect by thinking about our thoughts and placing them under God's authority, asking Him to purify the meditations of hearts.

Day 3

Matthew 12:37; Ephesians 4:15-16,29

All throughout the Bible, in the New Testament especially, God makes it clear to us how important our words are to Him. In the Gospels, Jesus tells us our words will either acquit us or condemn us. Indeed, many of the silliest arguments to the most serious of fights start with words, whether they were meant merely as a joke or as the worst of insults. Even during the course of the day when we're just expressing our opinions, we say things that aren't necessarily bad or rude, but would be better left unsaid.

While I don't suggest that we tussle with every single word we think about saying, we should understand the spirit in which we are saying things. Why are you saying what you're saying? Are you trying to subtly get back at someone for something they said that angered you? Are you trying to get a difficult truth across to someone you care about and don't want to see hurt themselves? Whatever the reason, we should ask for discernment when expressing ourselves, no matter what the setting is. God promises us wisdom if we ask for His counsel in faith.

Day 4

John 15:1-8

The fruit we bear in our lives is a reflection of our relationship with Christ. Christ says He is the True Vine and to remain in Him is the key to producing much (good) fruit. On the other hand, when we stray, we choose to do our own thing. This not only results in producing no fruit, but being completely cut off from Christ. As His disciples, our speech should reflect our connection with Christ; it should be good fruit, whether in the form of praise or encouragement, or simply being silent when we really have nothing of value to say.

Timing, audience, and content are all important things to consider when we are discerning whether or not we should say what we are thinking. We should also understand that our actions are fruit of our relationship with Christ. If our lifestyle embodies our relationship with Christ, our speech will find it difficult not to follow suit.

Day 5

Proverbs 4:6-9; Galatians 6:3-4

The Book of Proverbs is all about wisdom—it tells us to seek wisdom and insight at any price. Whether or not we realize it, we accept information every day as wisdom and apply it to our lives. The question is, is this God’s wisdom, or is it merely good wisdom? Many people read magazines and books or watch talk shows like “Oprah” or “Dr. Phil” and really take their advice to heart. Often, many of the remedies have a basis in the Scriptures in some form or another. The problem is that the advice is mainly founded upon what we want to hear, rather than what we need to hear.

Galatians 6:3-4 tells us we fool only ourselves if we think we are something other than what we are—fallen men and women who need God not only to help them stand again, but to truly live life as it was meant to be lived. So the next time we accept any piece of advice as genuine, we should ask ourselves if it’s godly wisdom (something truly from God, meant to make us more like Christ) or is it worldly wisdom (meant to make us “good” people through watered-down self-sacrifice)?

Devotion .003

Day 1

James 4:1-3

Waterloo. Gettysburg. Pearl Harbor. Baghdad. War has been a part of the human existence since Cain slew Abel, as told in Genesis 4. You would think after thousands of years of death and sorrow we would have learned better, but we, as in humanity, have the same problem as Cain. He killed his brother because God favored Abel’s offering over his own. Today that desire for things we don’t have still runs rampant.

Apparently, we also like to do things the hard way. If only we would ask God for these things, we wouldn’t have to shed even the most theoretical form of blood to obtain them. On top of that we don’t like to compare our motivations with God’s. We get mad at Him because He doesn’t do things our way. Just as in Cain’s situation, sin is crouching at our doors. It may have already taken up residence on the couch and be shouting out orders. God wants better for us and is ready to give it if we are willing to let Him take control.

Day 2

James 4:4-10

Monks of various faiths seek to find communion with God through solitude. The most devoted of these will wall themselves off, leaving only a slot through which food can be inserted. That's it. While I appreciate their fervency, when James told us not to be friendly with the world, he didn't mean we all had to run off and join communes or wall ourselves away from the world to escape it. If we all did that, it would be rather hard to love our neighbors and fulfill the Great Commission.

The *world* here does not refer to the people but the ideals accepted and purported by society. We're supposed to be here, but we're supposed to be visible, set apart from those things. James said when we get caught up in the world, we become an enemy of God. We undermine our testimony and the gospel with things such as divorce, pornography, and drugs. God has the wisdom of ages. He makes human wisdom look like child's play, yet somehow we think we know better. It is only when we humble ourselves before Him that He can use us fully to His glory and be exalted in His glory.

Day 3

James 4:11-12

When a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, it has a whole new look and a new life. But that doesn't change the fact that it started out life as a caterpillar. We are redeemed, but we're not perfect. When God offered His grace to us, He didn't hand off His judiciary robes to us. Jesus sat with tax collectors and touched lepers without the slightest hesitation, so how is His spirit showing in us when we cast judgments upon those around us? In accepting the sacrifice Jesus made for us, we did not somehow make us better than Jesus was Himself. Instead, we need to learn the art of living a life of service and remember the second greatest commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself. By this I don't mean love as we see it in the 21st century, but 1 Corinthians 13 love that is patient, kind, and unselfish in all its dealings.

Day 4

James 4:13-17

College is supposedly that time in life where you figure out who you are and what you're doing with your life. At least that's what the "adults" in our lives hope after the fifth major is declared. By the time the fourth, sixth, tenth year has come along, all that you really want to do is get out of school. At least that's how I felt as I was finishing up my first degree. I thought that when graduation came I would have everything in order. Then it was there, and suddenly it was terrifying.

Today's reality is that it is not unusual to change jobs, if not careers, three or four times. The awesome thing is, we don't have to worry. If we'll only let ourselves trust in God and let His plans take hold of our hearts and imaginations, He will outdo our most ambitious plans.

Day 5

James 5:1-6

A woman walked into a top-of-the-line store's clearance center and purchased a jacket on clearance for \$500. A great bargain, right? It was over 50 percent off the clearance center

price, already lower than retail. In a year or so, the jacket will be out of style, and without proper care will quickly fall into disarray. After spending a few years in the back of the closet, it then may be donated to a thrift store where it will be sold for \$5.

The woman's next-door neighbor donated \$500 to help those in need around the world. While the first woman's investment lasted a matter of months, her neighbor's investment will continue to affect the people whose lives it touched for years. So it is with our lives and time. Examine your heart and actions today. Is your focus solely your desires of the moment or are you seeking to impact the lives around you with less flash and more substance?

Devotion .004

Day 1

James 5:7-9

When a farmer plans his crops, he knows that it won't happen instantaneously. A number of steps go into the process of taking the food from a seed in the soil to the product in the local grocery store. Before the actual process of planting begins, the soil must be prepared for use. After the seeds make it into the ground, the seeds must grow to fruition.

It is the same way with people. Whether the seed offered is one of friendship, salvation, or something else (like romance), the person must be ready for it. They may need to have some breathing room or the support of friends to get out and experience life. Either way, if the person is not ready, that relationship will not take root. Then they need time to grow. Just as crops need rain, people need to be given words and actions that will encourage them to grow or they will never reach their full potential.

Day 2

James 5:10-11

There is an old saying that says you shouldn't pray for patience because who knows what God will give you to learn it. The admonition may be made in jest, but there is a truth in the center of it. Patience isn't learned in the midst of our comfort zone—it comes from tough life lessons God sends our way. We tend to consider someone patient if they don't get annoyed waiting in line at the grocery store or when it takes five minutes to get food at the drive-thru. Christ waited 30 years before He went into full-time ministry. Where would we be if He had decided He didn't want to wait for God's timing?

Elijah, Daniel, and David were faithful followers whose lives were threatened by their rulers. Ezekiel's wife was taken away from him as an example to Israel. Job lost everything. In the midst of the worst of their troubles there was probably a little voice somewhere asking if it was worth it. They decided it was and persevered through it all, waiting patiently on the Lord. In the end they found themselves even better off than before. Troubles are fleeting. In the end God always is standing there waiting with outstretched arms.

Day 3

James 5:12

Nothing seems to be simple these days. It takes three menus and five minutes of talking to a service representative while being offered every protection plan under the sun to

authorize a credit card. Traffic and the continual addition of traffic lights have turned a ten-minute drive into one that is twice as long. There are umpteen gazillion specialists out there who specialize in every thing you can think of. You need a “Complete Idiot’s Guide” to even begin to sort through them. No wonder we’re told to keep our commitments and vows to a simple yes or no. How much easier is that to depend upon than a ‘maybe’ or a ‘possibly, but I have to check my schedule’? When someone is a person of integrity they don’t have to swear upon any power that may be in order to be believed. They have a reputation for being truthful in their dealings. We don’t want to be like the boy who cried wolf and when it really mattered couldn’t get anyone to believe him. So make an earnest effort to be a person of integrity in all things so that when you speak your brothers and sisters will know that they can rely upon what you say.

Day 4

James 5:13-18

Research has shown that infants who are raised in orphanages with little human contact have trouble interacting with others later in life. Those surrounded with an affectionate, touching environment fare much better. We as human beings were not wired to function on our own. This is true both in our physical and spiritual lives. We need to be able to share the problems we are having in life instead of bottling them up inside.

Lifting up a concern in prayer can make an amazing difference. Even if the problem is not immediately resolved, the spirit knows that it is supported and suddenly the burden is much easier to bear. We don’t have to be perfect to find a circle of friends with whom to share our lives. It is in our shared imperfections that we become strong.

Day 5

James 5:19-20

Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth* is the bloodiest of all his tragedies. There is so much death by the end of the play that theater superstition will not even allow its name to be spoken near a performance space. Instead it is simply referred to as “the Scottish play.” The death of the king starts with a small flame of greed within Macbeth that his wife fans and coerces into a blaze of desire and pride.

By the time Macbeth dies, he is a haunted man, literally. He cannot escape his ghosts, and his long, bloody road to ruin began with simple greed. He didn’t start out as a rampant murderer and he was not totally without a conscience. He just allowed himself to be swayed in the wrong direction. If someone had come along and interrupted Lady Macbeth’s inciting speech, he very likely would have given up the blade and let the king live. But that did not happen; the rest is tragedy. It is important we remain involved in each other’s lives in honest, loving relationships that seek the best for each other even if it means that honesty must be brutal.