ENCOURAGING

31 day devotional for parents of new Union students
August 2015

Dear Parent,

Welcome, and thank you for entrusting your student to the Union community. As a parent, you are a valuable member of the Union University family. We thank God for you and are grateful to serve your family.

Students at Union receive a Christ centered education that promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society, and we are praying for God to bless your child’s entire educational experience—from the classroom to the intramural field to the laboratory to the local church and beyond. Beginning college is an important and exciting time!

Not only is your student experiencing the transition to college life, you are transitioning to your student being away from home. In addition to our specific and ongoing prayers for new students at Union, we are also praying for you. This collection of devotionals has been written for you. In these pages you will find encouraging Scriptures and words shared from some of Union’s faculty and staff who are journeying alongside your student during these University years.

“Grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” 2 Peter 3:18.

Know of our prayers for your student and for you. As we journey together in days ahead, do not hesitate to call on us (universityministries@uu.edu or 731.661.5062).

In Christ,

Todd E. Brady
Vice President for University Ministries
Table of Contents

Welcome to Parents ................................................................. 3
Faith of our Fathers and Mothers ........................................... 6
The Zacchaeus Principle ......................................................... 8
Be Intentional ......................................................................... 10
Be Strong and Courageous .................................................... 12
Mercy for Each Day ............................................................... 14
Taking the Time to Pray .......................................................... 16
Sending Them Forth ............................................................... 18
Hope in God ........................................................................... 20
How Then Shall We Live ........................................................ 22
New Season, New Mercies ....................................................... 24
Praying Parents ...................................................................... 26
One Degree of Glory to Another ............................................. 28
Long-Distance TLC ................................................................. 30
Tragedy ................................................................................ 32
Roots and Wings ................................................................... 34
Global Missions ..................................................................... 36
Parenting from Afar ............................................................... 38
Psalm 16:8 ............................................................................... 40
God’s Plan...They are the Solution .......................................... 42
Demystifying the Will of God .................................................. 44
Prepared for His Service ......................................................... 46
Homesickness ....................................................................... 48
Fleshing it Out ....................................................................... 50
Praying for Your Student’s Spiritual Growth ......................... 52
The Right Path ....................................................................... 54
Christ and Truth .................................................................... 56
Plans ................................................................................... 58
Do Not Fear Anything that is Frightening ................................. 60
Letting Go and Loving God ..................................................... 62
Life in the Liminal Space ......................................................... 64
Don’t Be Afraid ..................................................................... 66
Contributors .......................................................................... 68

Save the Date
September 25–26, 2015

www.uu.edu/events/familyweekend
Faith of our Fathers and Mothers

C. Ben Mitchell

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 2 Timothy 1:5-7

Each one of us is the beneficiary of the gracious love of a grandparent, parent, family member, pastor, or friend who first shared the good news of Jesus with us. In this case, Paul expressed thanksgiving for the faithfulness of young pastor Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice. Through their testimony Timothy became follower of the living Christ and a preacher of the gospel.

Although these words have a particular context they also have a general application. Whatever your son or daughter’s calling from God, the faculty, staff, and administration of Union University give thanks for the deposit of faith you provided your child over the years. We take very seriously the stewardship responsibility we have to help your child “fan into flame the gift of God.”

Those who originally founded Harvard College in 1636 defined its mission this way: “Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well (that) the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ... and, therefore to lay Christ at the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.” Though Harvard abandoned this mission long ago, Union University has not. We all hear too often of students going off to college and losing their faith. Our aim is not to wreck your son’s or daughter’s faith, but to strengthen, deepen, sharpen, refine, and bolster his or her faith. Moreover, we aim to help your child respond to the challenges of an increasingly pluralistic culture by helping them think critically about what they’re learning so that, in the words of the apostle Peter, we can help them be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

So, as you pray for your child today, remember that Union is on the same team with you. We are fanning the flame of faith so that your son or daughter will leave here stronger, more firmly established in the gospel, and ready to take it to the ends of the earth in whatever discipline he or she is studying. And as you pray for your child today, would you take a moment and pray for the Union University faculty, staff, and administration. We are grateful you have entrusted us with the precious gift of your child and we pledge to do our very best help them not to fear the future, but to grow in “power and love and self-control” for the glory of the risen Christ.

Father, thank you for loving our children even more than we do. And thank you for planting in their hearts a living faith by your Holy Spirit. May their love for Jesus grow fuller and deeper today as they study, learn, attend class, fellowship with others, and prepare for a lifetime of service in your Kingdom.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Matthew 22:37

Is your student living by “The Zacchaeus Principle”? Are you?

While Bible studies and prayer groups are a regular part of campus activities at Union, students also come into contact with the writings of people like Francis Shaeffer, St. Augustine, Chuck Colson, J. I. Packer, Dorothy Sayers, and more. There are many avenues on campus where students experience the intentional Christian learning community which your child has joined.

Through all that takes place at Union, we encourage students to integrate Christian faith with every aspect of learning and living. Too often, modern society encourages the compartmentalization of faith. Christians read their Bibles, pray, and engage in spiritual activities. However, bringing Christian faith to bear on literally every aspect of life is the result of a person who truly loves “the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37) The discouraging status of contemporary culture in America makes it undeniably clear that simply “loving Jesus” is not enough to be the salt and light which we are called to be. Our faith cannot merely be an avenue for personal piety that makes us feel better about ourselves. It must be the foundational framework from which we approach all of life.

During their time at Union, students who are being prepared to perform skillfully in the marketplace are learning to think and live Christianly as they do so. It is our hope that through nursing, education, law, science, engineering, and more that Union graduates will step into the future working and living in such a way as to serve the world and honor Christ through every aspect of their lives.

Sure, Bible studies, chapel services, and mission trips are dynamic parts of the Union University experience. However, there is much more. In English classes, intramural games, special lectures, and student life activities, students are encouraged to flesh out their faith in all of their thinking and living.

In Luke 19, Zacchaeus climbed up in the sycamore tree because he wanted to get a better look at Jesus. He realized that he could see Jesus better if he positioned himself differently. In a manner of speaking, there are “trees” throughout the Union campus—trees where students, if they will but look, can see Jesus like they have never seen him before. “The Zacchaeus Principle” is played out daily as students are led to see and understand the truths of Christianity through every thing that takes place on the campus.

Lord, may Union University be a place where my student can gain a better vision and understanding of who You are through the events of her college career. During these days, lead her to love You more with heart, soul, and mind.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
As you were helping your son or daughter pack for college throughout this summer, how many times did you find yourself wondering “where did all the time go”? Have you stopped and found yourself staring at your child more than once recently, lost in your thoughts about how it’s even possible your baby is moving away? Rest assured, parent, you are not the only one.

But, there’s hope. You don’t have to just sit and reflect on all the things left unsaid or undone. Take time to ponder, pray, and then plan. Be intentional about how you interact with your student from a distance and when face to face with them. Be intentional about getting to know their friends and finding out what is important to your child. Be intentional to model your family’s priorities and offer a place of refuge for them.

Encourage your student to be intentional as well. They will be bombarded with new people and new opportunities. Remind them to choose their friends wisely and to seek out a mentor. Remind them also that while they may want to be involved in many things, they should seek to maintain margin. Encourage your child to strive for excellence and not settle for mediocrity.

Ephesians 5:10 states that we are to “find out what pleases the Lord”. Together with your adult children, you can seek His Word to find out what pleases Him. He in turn will make their paths straight when they trust and obey (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Don’t dwell on the “if onlys.” Look forward with anticipation to the next few years of your child’s college career. Be intentional.
Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

I remember how difficult it was for our family to leave Jeff, our oldest son, at Union University. We were serving as missionaries in Southeast Asia with the International Mission Board, so a return trip to the States for an emergency was twenty-eight hours. Our closest relatives lived in Texas, a ten-hour drive away. We had limited contacts in Tennessee. Although Jeff had researched the top 200 Christian colleges in the South and chosen Union, we found ourselves filled with anxious questions about the future.

Transitions force us to close one chapter of our lives and start another one. Changes like that are never easy. Feeling frightened and afraid of failure go with times of transition. Even the spiritual giant Joshua faced them. Moses was dead -- the great liberator of Israel -- and Joshua had taken his place. Israel has wandered in the wilderness 40 years and continued to struggle with unbelief. The Promise Land called across the Jordan River, guarded by the menacing walls of Jericho. A thousand decisions to make and share. Joshua weighed the pros and cons of his decisions, coming to conclusions, but then going through the process repeatedly. Everything was new and changing: sleepless nights, tears, regrets, possibilities, hopes, and dawning days.

God commands Joshua in his transition time to be strong and courageous. He also commands him not to be frightened or dismayed. The reason is simple – God promises to be with him wherever he goes. People carry a picture in their mind of how the future will be. For some people, that picture has dark clouds, while others see bright shiny days. Your vision of the future, however, is not as important as who you see in the future. Watching your child leave home and start a new life is heart wrenching. You can be strong and courageous, though, knowing that God has called your child to Union University and that He will be with them every second of every day. You can be open to the new thing God is doing in you and them and celebrate His faithfulness.

Most of us believe that everything will turn out right in the end, but making it through today is the hardest part. We look at Joshua’s successes and marvel, but forget that he accomplished them living one day at a time. Things haven’t changed. God still uses transition times in our lives to expose our unbelief and strengthen our faith. He did so in Joshua’s life and does the same in ours, too.

Like the children of Israel, we can get comfortable in our routines: wake up, gather manna, eat manna, walk in the wilderness, talk with friends, go to bed, do the same routine tomorrow. Transitions jar us out of unbelief and awaken us to life-giving faith. Let God use this transition in your life to strengthen your trust in Him. Let God use this transition like a flashlight to show the areas of unbelief gnawing away at your spiritual life. Let God use this transition to change how you view the future and make you a strong and courageous parent.

**Personal Prayer and Reflections**

```markdown


```
Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Ever wondered how you will make it through the month or week ahead? Sending your child to college can be overwhelming...Will he make new friends? Will she do well academically? Will his desire to pursue Christ continue to grow? Will she ever want to come home to visit on the weekends/holidays? In addition, you have your own “worries” that add to the stress of everyday life. Financial challenges, health struggles, and family issues probably already consume your prayer life. You might wonder how you can add one more thing.

Thankfully, Lamentations 3:22-23 tells us, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” The Lord’s mercies are new every morning. We do not need to wonder how we will make it through the month or week ahead; the Lord will provide new mercies each day! In Exodus 16, we read that the Israelites had enough manna for each day, but they could not store manna for the next day (except on the sixth day). If they tried to gather two days’ worth of manna, then it would spoil. Just like the Israelites, we need to be reminded that the Lord will provide strength, endurance, and mercy for each day...not each week...each day.

So, when your student calls or sends a frantic text saying he is overwhelmed by the obligations of the first semester of school, remind her that the Lord’s mercies are new each morning. When you wonder how you can make it through the next deadline at work or surgical procedure or even get out of bed to face another day, be reminded that the Lord’s mercies are new every day.

Lord, thank you that you are faithful. Thank you that your mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. As I think about this fall semester, I pray that I am reminded that your mercies are new each day. I pray that I remind my child of this promise so that together we seek you anew every day.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---
The Lord is near to all who call out to Him, to all who call out to Him in truth. Psalm 145:16

Think about the first moment you saw your student as a baby—that face was written instantly on your mind and that name was instantly branded on your lips. That face and name could never be forgotten – the intimacy, wonder, and hope of that first moment was carved into your heart forever. Yet no matter the age of your child, your heart will always see him and speak his name like you did that first time.

Now, instead of calling him in for supper or reminding him to do his homework, you have the choice to call out his name to God in prayer. Your duties as a parent have changed to include mentoring and friendship, but your role before God will never change as a parent interceding for your child. Your arms can be full again with your student as you hold him up to the Father for protection (see Ephesians 6:10-17). Your nights can be spent in the rocking chair again as you cradle him before the Father for wisdom (see Proverbs 9:10-12).

Interceding for your student means lifting up his needs and desires as if they were your own – to present them passionately to God Who has engraved forever your name, and that of your student, on His palm of His hand (Isaiah 49:16). Intercession means entering into the Presence of God Whose memories never fade (Psalm 111:5); Whose love for both of you never changes (Romans 8:38-39); and Who sees you and your student (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Prayer is a strong three-stranded cord linking you, your student, and God (Ecclesiastes 4:12). It is a cord strong enough to hold your student tightly to God’s Ways (Proverbs 22:6). God will strengthen this cord to contain your tears and lengthen this cord to tether your heart and your student’s until the day when there will be no more tears and no more separation (Revelation 7:17). On that day when you and your student will see God, face to Face (1 Corinthians 13:12), and speak His Name.

Take some time today to thank God for the gift of your student. Thank Him for His Plan and Purpose for both of you. Thank God for His always perfect care for you and for the child who has been entrusted to you for now and set apart unto Himself for eternity (Ephesians 1:4).

Dear Father God, thank You for holding me close as I pray for my student. Please help me learn to love him like You do.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
Psalm 127, especially verses 3-4:
Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,  
the fruit of the womb a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior 
are the children of one’s youth.

It is right that we care deeply for our children and value them highly. They are “a heritage” and “a reward” from God himself. So of course we are nervous about leaving them at college and launching them on this new chapter of their lives. What we care for, we naturally want to keep close and hold on tightly.

However, notice also that they are compared to arrows. Arrows were never intended to stay in the quiver. In order to accomplish their purpose they must be sent forth. In the same way our children were never intended to remain with us under our care. God gave them to us to shape and form, and then they must be sent out. They must be unleashed to go and accomplish the kingdom purposes which God has for them.

Down deep we know this, and we would not want to keep them from going out. However, watching them go can expose anxieties, fears and feelings of our own inadequacies. Are they ready? Have we prepared them well? Have we done all that we should?

The fact is that we have not been perfect parents. We have not done all that we could have done and we have failed to do some things we should have done. We are imperfect, and we may be most painfully aware of this fact at times like this. What should we do? We should do what we should always do with our sins and failures- take them to the cross. God gave us children knowing we are fallen people. His grace, which is our only hope for salvation, is also our only hope for parenting.

So, as we send out our arrows we know they too are in need of grace. But we send them forth, and we fall on our knees asking God to bless our labors in parenting and to fill in the gaps. Having shaped our children and aimed them, we let them go and ask the Master of the wind to guide them and keep them on course so that they might accomplish all the work He has intended for them. They are after all His “heritage” and He cares more for their faithfulness even than we do.

Lord, thank you for the children you have given me. Thank you for all the ways you have helped me to teach and train them. Thank you for your grace and forgiveness for all the ways I have come up short as a parent, and thank you that you love my children even more than I do. Please bless and guide my children today as they make decisions, as they grow and develop. May they grow in Christlikeness and in devotion to you. Please use their time at Union to this end.

Tip: Use Psalm 127 and Psalm 128 as guides for praying for your child and for the rest of your family.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Now that you have successfully enrolled your child at Union, are you beginning to wonder how you will cover the remaining financial cost of your child’s education? As I’ve worked with college students over the years, I have encountered countless parents concerned about the cost of higher education. These parents have wanted the best education possible for their children, and they’ve recognized the value of a Christian university. Nevertheless, they have questioned how they could possibly find the resources to help their children achieve their educational goals. Indeed, when I first started working in higher education, I often wondered how a student would ever obtain the necessary funds to complete a degree. At times, there were students whose financial situations seemed hopeless. However, over and over again, I witnessed God’s amazing provision for His children. I now rest in the truth that when God has called a student to a particular place, He will provide all that is needed.

I once worked with a student who came from a troubled home and received no financial support from her family. To make ends meet, she worked several jobs in the summer as she tried to save for the upcoming school year. In addition to working her way through college, she also utilized student loans to help cover the cost of her education. During the summer before her junior year, she worked as a waitress at a local restaurant. One afternoon, she was approached by a customer she had just waited on. Over the course of the meal, the student had been asked to share a bit of her story. Learning that she was a struggling college student pursuing a Christian education, the customer informed her that the tip would be a little unusual. The Lord had put it on his heart to both pay for her remaining two years of college and assist her in repaying her student loans.

God definitely uses our financial needs to help strengthen our reliance on Him, and I have had the great privilege of watching this play out in the lives of students and their families. I worked closely with one student during his first three years of college. As his junior year was concluding, we both knew he was out of funds. We had actually exhausted all options for financing his senior year. As we prayed together before he left for summer vacation, we had strong doubts about whether or not he could return for the fall semester and complete his degree. Neither of us could imagine how God might cover the large tuition bill for his senior year. Throughout the summer, we spoke frequently and continued to pray about the situation. As August drew near, the student’s finances remained the same. However, to the amazement of us both, one morning I received a substantial check to cover the student’s entire senior year. The finances unexpectedly came from a family who belonged to the church the student had attended during the school year.

As you and your child ponder the commitment of the cost of a Christ Centered education, rest assured that He is faithful. God has a plan for each student, and He will provide in ways that bring glory to Him.

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Mathew 6:31-32
He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32

We believe in one God, Maker of heaven and earth, who by His Word sustains all things and is alone rightly Lord of all. We believe that following the first man, all of humanity has willfully rebelled against its Creator, seeking its own rights and earning the wages of sin: death. And we believe that out of the incomparable riches of His grace, God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, through whose death and resurrection we have been made heirs of eternal hope.

So how then shall we live?

Shall our beliefs reside only in our minds or pervade every area of our living? Will we relegate the truth of God’s Gospel to our quiet times and corporate worship or will it overwhelm every decision, every relationship, every anxious thought?

Over nearly two decades, you have given yourselves tirelessly to raise the child God entrusted to your care and whom you have just committed to Union University. Week after week, you’ve prayed over her, watched her grow, provided for her needs, and wondered how her future would unfold. She learned from you the truth of Christ and has clearly displayed the fruit of the Spirit in his own life. You can rest in the generous provision of grace poured over the life of your child.

But what if her roommates are mean? Or worse, what if the professor is mean? What if your son gets sick? What if your daughter gets a bad grade? What if he’s chosen the wrong major? What if she’s picked the wrong school? And how do we afford it all?

Hear the gentle voice of your Father in the midst of any anxiety you may confront: “I did not spare my own Son; will I not graciously give her all things? Won’t I meet all his needs according to my glorious riches in Christ?”

College does not require an abdication of your parental role, but rather an ever-increasing commitment to display your unyielding faith in the God who loves us enough to give up His Son on our behalf. Let your son, your daughter, your spouse, your church and your community hear the good news of Christ resound in every stanza of your life as you walk in the knowledge that nothing will separate us from His love.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Reveal the places in my life where your Gospel has not been allowed to prevail and remind me afresh of the abundance of your grace. Amen.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
New Season, New Mercies

Rhonda Hudson

I remember being upset with myself when I woke up at 5:15 a.m., as had been my routine, the day after my youngest graduated from high school! There was no reason to awaken so early to make sure my teen was awake and on the move. But my body, on its own, came to alertness just as it had so many weekday mornings before!

I remember feeling slightly upset as I closed my eyes again, willing them to go back to sleep. It was to no avail. This was my new awakening to this new season of life, and I did not know quite what to do with myself.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19

I finally got up, and sat to complete my 5-minute devotional, as usual. In His still small voice, God invited me to spend a little extra time, this time, listening instead of praying. Thumbing through scriptures, He led me to this scripture and that. In those moments, He warmed me to the idea of spending my extra moments with Him. Now, instead of rising to awaken my teen, I looked forward to spending extra time with Him, and in the Word.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23

Since I began giving my extra moments of devotion time with God, He has shown me that His mercies are indeed very new each new day, and in every season. God was both furthering my faith, and making Himself known in a way that I could not imagined at the same time. Time and time again, He has shown me that His purpose is higher than I could have believed or conceived. He has been glorified time and time again by extra moments I yield to Him each day.

In the same way, God is doing a new thing, and has a new plan and purpose from this new time you have been given. Since He is everlasting, He has new mercies to share with you each day! Take some time in your extra moments to seek and find how He may be glorified in moments yielded to Him in this next season!

Personal Prayer and Reflections
Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3 John 1:2

I remember a time early in college when I found myself really struggling to adapt. I was far from home, in a new environment, and honestly feeling very lonely. It was not that I hadn’t met a lot of awesome new friends, or even that I was not enjoying the whole college experience, but still I felt that there was something missing. The toughest part about it was that I really didn’t feel comfortable telling anyone else about my struggle. Instead I wanted to hide it all away and act as if everything was fine. This went on for approximately two months, and I remember praying so many times that I actually just wished that someone else somewhere was praying for me! No matter how I attempted to disguise my anxiety and slight depression, it soon became obvious to others that something was a little off.

It was at that time that one of the guys living next to me stepped in and started to disciple me. He opened the Word of God to me in a very new way, and began to challenge me to live for God with a new passion unlike any that I had ever experienced! He took me under his wing, and truly displayed “Christ-like” love for me. I was encouraged so much through the process, and now, looking back I can see that this was what I really was missing all along, encouragement. God places people around us so that we might love and encourage them through various means and methods. Unfortunately, many of us fail to practice this all too often. We instead get so wrapped up in our own lives that we fail to play the part of Christ in the lives of others. I’m so glad that this brother was obedient to God’s call “to love one another.”

Sometime later when I was back at home visiting with my parents, I shared with them my former struggle, and confessed how depressed I seemed to feel during that time. I then told them of the mercies of God and how just at the right time He provided a brother for me to lean on! The next scene I still remember so vividly. My parents told me that they had sensed the struggles that I had. Many nights they had gone to bed praying that all would go well with me, and that God would give me strength in my time of need. Oh, the greatness of God!

Parents, as you are away from your students at this time, please remember to pray unceasingly for them! There are so many pressures that come with this phase of life, and at times they can feel as if the world is on their shoulders. Surround them in prayer, and ask God to send mature believers into their lives to mentor and disciple them through the rough waters. Remember just how faithful He has been to your family in the past, and praise Him for the blessings of the future!
Father God,
We come before you as this semester begins, and we recognize that you are Lord. Even in the little things of this life, you are God. God we are so thankful that you care enough about us to send Jesus, your only Son, to die for us that we may live. As if that weren't enough, you sent your Holy Spirit so that we may be like Him. So we just ask that you sanctify us, Oh Lord. Continue the good work in us until it is completed. Amen.

One Degree of Glory to Another
Rusty Tuders

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (ESV)

One of my favorite new hobbies is woodworking. The very first thing I ever built was a small picnic table for my nephew. I didn’t have the right tools, but I spent days in the woodshop cutting boards and re-cutting them. I wanted to make sure each cut was just right before I started assembling the table. I thought I would never finish it. I almost even gave up all together. Then the table began to take shape. It looked less and less like a pile of lumber and more like a piece of furniture. Now, my brother sends me pictures of my nephew eating at it or playing on it, and a certain sense of joy fills my heart.

I’ve begun to see my woodworking as a metaphor for what happens in the life of every believer. Paul says in Corinthians that we all are being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. How amazing is that? Paul also says that this transformation happens one degree of glory at a time. Paul is referring to the sanctification process. The Holy Spirit is working one degree at a time to mold us into the image of Christ.

We usually tend to shy away from change, even if that change is for the better. We like to keep things the way they are because it’s safe and comfortable that way. But what if I decided that I wanted to keep my pile of lumber as just a pile of lumber? This is probably a silly analogy, however I think it serves it point. I am so glad that you have chosen to embrace change (or at least accept it), and let the Lord do His work with your student. I am confident that God will use the tools that Union has to do some work in their life, and yours as well. One degree of glory at a time.
To the contrary, your guidance, my guidance, the guidance of friends and others in the Union community, all of this guidance needs to be gathered, evaluated, and acted upon by your student. If they need medicine for strep throat or for major depression, it will ultimately be up to them to take the medicine or not. The best we can do, as parents, is to make sure our sons and daughters know they are loved and can be trusted to make good decisions. Sweet words and care packages from home can make that worst-sore-throat-ever, not quite so sore.

Finally, I would encourage you to find that fine line between parental concern and unfruitful worry. If we cannot, as Christ tells us in Matthew 6:27, add a single hour to our own lives with worry, how can we hope to help our children with it? Have peace.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---
Tragedy

Mary Anne Poe

The tornado warning activated the medical staff to its emergency response protocol. The nurse woke me in the middle of the night with instructions to go to the “safe,” interior room in the hospital. I grabbed my pillow and walked quickly along with all the other new mothers on that day in May 1987. The nurse brought Rebecca, my first born daughter, to cradle in my arms as we all sat along the wall on the floor.

Three years later, my young daughter and I found ourselves once again sheltering ourselves from a tornado coming our way. As we made our way home from a friend’s house on another stormy night, the tornado warnings came. I swerved into a fire station lot as the radio indicated the tornado was directly on the road in front of us. The firefighters welcomed us into their “safe” place in the basement of the fire house. I found comfort with my daughter in the nurturing embrace of the dark space below ground and out of harm’s way.

Tornado watches and warnings have been regular themes in the weather systems where we have lived. Our family has often found shelter in our closet and interior bathroom space, hoping and praying that the storm would pass without damage. February 5, 2008 was just another one of those nights. Rebecca, now 21 years old, was in her dorm with roommates. My younger daughter and husband were at home with me. The tornado watches and warnings had been foreshadowing the severity of the storm all day. I called Rebecca to assure myself that she was in a “safe” place as the radio and television blared the warnings of imminent danger. I could not cradle her in my arms this time or usher her into the closet. The tornado made a direct strike this time, destroying almost all of the dorms on campus. My daughter, like many other Union students, experienced the walls around her caving in and debris filling the air.

God does not guarantee safety to us or our children. We do not know when tragedy might strike. The approach of tornadoes or a countless list of other awful realities of the natural world threatens our well-being daily. Sickness and death come. Crime and violence strike. Economic and political turmoil dismay us. Just like the medical staff in the hospital and the firefighters at the firehouse, the Union University community has an emergency response plan. But even more importantly, the Union community offers the assurance of faith in a compassionate God. Your student will not be alone. Strong arms of support will be offered by the official administrators, but more significantly by the “family” of roommates, friends, and faculty. The Union community is prepared, by God’s grace, to bring the comforting presence of God’s Spirit and the power of God’s love and peace to your student in hard times. “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Lord God, I pray that you will spare my child tragedy during these college years. But even if tragedy comes, I pray that my student will experience the depth of the riches of your care and strength through the Union community. I pray that my student will also be a part of this community that provides care to others when tragedy comes. Thank you that even though we are not all together as a family, my child will not be alone in tough times.

Tip: Expect that after a while Union friends, faculty, and staff will come to be like “family” to your child. Encourage them to participate fully in these natural helping networks of support.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
W hen I first started teaching many, many years ago, I received a calligraphy quote from the mother of one of my students. This treasured quote still graces my office today. The quote is from Hodding Carter who borrowed it from Reverend Henry Ward Beecher. It reads, “There are two things we should give our children: one is roots and the other is wings.” As a young parent I truly thought the “root” development would be the most difficult. With age comes wisdom and I quickly discovered the “wing” development is was much harder.

Whether it is a teenager feeling the first taste of freedom beyond the safety of home, a high school graduate seeing college as a big brass ring, or a young adult facing the routine of the work world, they still are our children seeking wings. These wings are not just about freedom and independence but I believe more about a search for significance and purpose in life. No parent wants their student to drift through life in mediocrity without a calling. However, the process of flight to the parent is like separating your heart from your body. We want our children to be authentic, real children of God, not counterfeit copies of “our” dreams.

St. Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” That restlessness comes from trying to be something God has not designed us to be, working outside of His plan. Os Guinness put it this way, “There is no idea short of God’s call that can ground and fulfill the truest human desire for purpose and fulfillment.” St. Augustine’s rest and Guinness’s grounding come from being the person God created us to be—the real you!

The wings allow your student to seek and find who God created them to be and understand their purpose in His kingdom. The wings give them insight into their giftedness and design. It affirms Who made them and why they were made.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

In the Greek language the word “workmanship” denotes a masterpiece...a work of art. He made us a work of art, a great masterpiece. There is only one original and your perfectly beautiful son or daughter is equipped with a purpose and the power to achieve that purpose for His Glory.

• CREATED (“we are His workmanship”) We were created by God in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). This passage speaks specifically about being “recreated” through the redeeming work of Christ due to our sin that spoiled God’s reflection in us. Thankfully, believers have had the privilege to experience the creative hand of God twice (II Corinthians 5:17).
• CALLED (“created for good works”)
• COMMISSIONED (“God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”)

“Since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be.” Romans 12:6

The Message

Paul wrote in Romans for us to “be what we were made to be.” It is when you release your student to our Lord that they can discover who they are designed to be. Being the man or the woman God designed means becoming an authentic, liberated person. This may involve breaking the “mold” that you have made for them or even the “mold” they made for themselves. Playing a role is not nearly as exciting as living the role our Creator designed for us. If the wing process seems a little daunting for you as a parent, take a look at some examples of men and women who found their wings after being given some very deep roots.

How did each of these individuals live out God’s calling in his/her life? Deborah in Judges 4; Esther in Esther 4; Moses in Exodus 4; Paul in Philippians 3: 4-14

Are you feeling better about those wings? You have given your student roots grounded in God’s Word, now rejoice and see the marvelous wings that our Creator and Designer has wonderfully crafted for your son or daughter.

Pray for your student to seek the perfect WING plan by discovering their calling in life that was designed, developed, and defined by our Creator by praying 1 Corinthians 2:9.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” I Corinthians 2:9
Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. Psalm 46:10

As I prepared to depart for a two-year term of service in Germany with the International Mission Board, my parents blessed me tremendously by not only allowing me to go but also encouraging me to obediently pursue that to which I felt God had called me. I share with you my parents’ public affirmation from my commissioning service before my departure: “As John said, ‘I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.’” (3 John 1:4) God knows that our greatest possession – if we can call them that – is our children. And so we say to Him, ‘We have given Julie to You over and over throughout her life, and with the greatest joy and the greatest gratefulness, our hands are open.’ It’s not our call on her life, not our choice for her to go, but it’s our choice to say, ‘We love You, Lord. Take her where You will, do with her what You will.’ To deny this call would be against all we have taught her, all we say we believe, and all that Scripture says.

I didn’t just wake up one day thinking, “I think I’ll go be a missionary in Germany.” Honestly, it is still a little amusing to me that I even went! But, there is no question that God used significant people and events in my life throughout my time as a college student at Union to open my mind, my eyes and my heart to His heart, which is for all the nations.

My first international mission trip was a GO Trip to Israel my junior year at Union. I was a little nervous about telling my parents I was interested in going. I had never been out of the country and didn’t know how supportive they would be about this seemingly great opportunity. Thankfully, even though they were cautious, they were very supportive of my interest in going – and my eventual decision to go.

I look back now and see how significant the support of my parents was and am incredibly grateful that winning them over was not a battle I had to fight. I can’t count the number of conversations I’ve had with friends or students over the past few years who found themselves in quite different situations with their parents. Even when the cost for my parents was high, they sought to prod me along in obedience to God regardless of what He was calling me to do—or where He was calling me to go.

Each year hundreds of Union students literally travel the world on short-term, University Ministries-sponsored mission trips. During GO Week each fall, opportunities for joining God in what He is doing locally, domestically, and globally are made known to students through chapel services, Global Gatherings, on-campus guests from the local community, from around the country, and from all over the world. Our prayer is that God uses this week to ignite in Union students a consuming passion for what is seen all throughout Scripture—God’s desire for all nations to know and worship Him as the One, True, Living God.

With GO Week just around the corner, pray for students to be obedient to God’s call to GO. Should your student want to go, pray for wisdom and discernment. In addition, pray for those at Union who lead students in these efforts.

Father, move mightily in the lives of students at Union as you continue to advance Your Kingdom. May You guide my child as he/she seeks to know Your will and may my child follow You with complete abandon.
Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

When my son, Steve, finished the fourth grade, he brought home all of his papers and supplies from the entire year. It was quite a compilation of things; however, the single item of which he was most proud was a letter from his teacher. She had taken the time to write a personal letter to Steve (and I am sure one was written to every student in that class) that described his strengths, his unique qualities, and his unquestionable potential for a stellar future. How proud Steve was of that letter!

As Steve grew into adulthood and had moments of doubt in discovering our Lord’s intentions for him, we began the habit of reading that letter on occasion. With each new developmental stage, the letter seemed to offer clarity to Steve as it described the person he had been. With this reminder of how he had used his God-given talents in the past, he was able to think about how these characteristics could look in his life in the future.

Understanding ourselves, our strengths and our limitations, is a life-long process. Philippians 1:6 reminds us that “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” In other words, the lessons that we have taught our children and all of the principles that we have tried to instill in them are there. And our Lord promises that He will support our children as they learn to use them, regardless of the amount of time that it takes.

Having children at home for eighteen years gives parents enormous influence over them. So, the question becomes, how can parents continue to support their children even though the support is now from afar?

First, parents need to remember that lessons important to know and understand have already been taught, by mouth and deed, probably several times.

Second, parents can send cards, cartoons from the newspaper, quotes from reading material, etc. in the context of, “I thought of you because I remember when…” These items can remind students of who they have been in the past as well encourage them as they think about the future. And don’t forget - students still love to get mail!

Lord, thank You for past teachers who have pointed my student in the right direction. Thank You for my opportunities to mold my student in Your image. Help us to live lives that are clarifying rather than confusing, lives that point my student to You.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
I sit and write this from my favorite chair in one of my favorite parts of our house. All 3 of my teenage boys are gone at this very moment. It’s just me and the two dogs sitting together, computer on my lap and their heads all but resting on the keyboard. I’m thinking about you, mom and dad. I’m thinking about the days leading up to the drive to Union and I’m thinking about the days thereafter. There is a lot to think about and feel in those moments.

I think God slowly prepares us for the time when our sweet babies leave our nest. Our lives beautifully change the day they enter the world. They then turn 2 and everything changes. They turn 6 and head to kindergarten and everything changes. They turn 13, and they think everything changes. They turn 16, and everything really does start to change. They turn 18, and everything is changing so quickly that we feel as if we are trying to capture every moment as if it is our last with them. With each year of their life, we are preparing them to “go.” Going is hard when you love someone as much as we do. Our children are a part of our hearts. To let them go can be downright painful.

*sigh*

This “going” will be full of many emotions for me, just as it is for you right now. You see…my oldest will be a Sr. in high school this year. I am constantly looking at my life at Union, along with the many conversations that I have with students and families through the lens of “mom.” I may be on staff here, but I’m mom first no matter where I am. Outside of my own life and my marriage, it’s the thing I’ve done the longest. God is slowly preparing my heart for my son’s time to “go.” I’ve already begun to think about a year from now. It’s almost time.

*another sigh*

As parents there are seasons when we feel very confident and feel as if we are in the groove with this whole parenting thing. We walk through a season or two on cruise control, don’t we? My cruise control has now shifted into high speed. These last years of high school are flying by and I begin to wonder often, “Have I taught my children anything at all? Have I taught them the big things and the little things necessary for life? Will they continue to love the Lord outside of our home? Do they know how to get up in the morning on their own? Do they know how to fix any kind of food at all? Will they have Godly friends who point them to Christ? Oh, and what about the laundry? I have boys…Lord, help them. Do they know anything about taking care of their space and property? Again, Lord, help them.”

Panic can easily set in. But you know what? I stop and take a deep breath and know deep in my heart….they are ready. It’s simply time. Their days won’t be perfect. There will be bumps and bruises and scrapes along the way just like those years when they toddled around at age 2 and life seemed like one new adventure after another. We are there again.

“No matter what, I’m always here for you, son. Always.”

Life is big, fun and exciting right now and that’s exactly where God wants your sweet child to be. It’s a new season indeed. We surrender them to His care (even if it’s for the 100th time). We trust Him with our babies (even if it’s for the 100th time). We know that He loves them more than we will ever comprehend (even if we have to say it out loud every day, all day).

*sigh*

We rest in the promises of His Word and we let them go. We let them go knowing that He created that precious child of ours. Remember, our children are fearfully and wonderfully made. He knows every hair on their sweet head. He knows the good plans He has for them. He will never, ever leave them.

I’m praying for you, mom and dad. I’m almost in your shoes. Come back and check on me next year and remind me of my own words.

I am so thankful for your children. Thank you for sharing them with us and entrusting us to their care and guidance. Thank you for allowing all of us on campus to be a part of your child’s life. I promise you this…..we will love them and take the absolute best care of them we can. We see them as the precious gift they are.

We are in this together and we trust God to guide us along the way. The journey isn’t over. A new journey is beginning. God will continue to be faithful during these days. It’s a beautiful new season and we are thrilled to be a part of it. We can do this together…..me, you, and the Lord, Jesus Christ!

“I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” Psalm 16:8

Psalm 16:8
Fran Thomas
God’s Plan...They are the solution.

Reneé M. Jones

Before our precious ones are born, we imagine what God has created them to be. We wonder how they will be, what will their laughs sound like, what will their smiles look like. Will they act more like mom or dad or will they love us half as much as we already love them? And we pray for God’s blessings to be in and over their lives. We have an endless connection with them before we ever see them. They bring us such excitement and joy even before their great arrival.

And, once they have entered our world, they add immeasurable blessings to our lives. Often you find yourself thinking, I can’t begin to imagine life without their little voices laughing and them running through the house with such energy, their precious little heads leaning on our chests with complete trust and safety in us as they rest. We have experienced joy. Then, they grow…and grow… They have their own experiences, joys, sorrows, ups, downs, accomplishments, and failures. The decision making process ensues, moral development occurs, and self-confidence and spiritual growth are expanding and underway. And, blessedly, you have become their first teacher. All the while, you are there to help them navigate this journey. You are their captain in the unpredictable sea of life. And one nagging, every present question remains, “What is their purpose?” You ask yourself will they be successful, happy, loving, strong, a leader…? What will they contribute to this world?

I am happy to share that God already has a plan for them that has been developed through their life’s journey and will continue to be so. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says,

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.

Through all of your prayers, lessons taught and their life experiences, God has destined them to be the solution to this world’s many problems. They will serve to be a beacon of hope for the hopeless and help build a future that glorifies God. And, as they grow, God will place additional teachers into their lives here at Union University- faculty, staff, and friends - to help unveil and cultivate the gifts that He has invested in them. The precious ones that rested so peacefully in your arms are destined for greatness in this world. Trust that God’s plan for their lives will come to fruition. And, that if they put and keep Him first in their lives, that He will fulfill His promise. And, you will know that you were a part of a beautiful plan, an amazing gift, which has graced this world not to simply exist but to serve as a significant impact for good. For the precious ones are of God’s Plan. And, by His grace and to this world, they will be a godly solution. Rest in Him. He has a plan.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
It is God's will for me to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul and mind.

It is God’s will for me to love my neighbor as myself. The will of God is for us to live in a relationship with Him and in community with others. This is freedom in Christ: there is no decision we can make that thwarts the will of God on earth. God can use any and every decision we make for His will.

God’s will in our life can be accomplished whether we live in Boston or Kansas.

God’s will in our life can be accomplished whether we major in English or PreMed. God’s will in our life can be accomplished whether we work for a nonprofit in Africa or a movie studio in Hollywood.

When your student calls home struggling over a decision, remind him or her of this truth. God is infinite. He loves us. There is no decision we can make to thwart His will.

When you are laying awake late in the night, grieving a choice your student has made, find comfort. He loves us. There is no decision we can make to thwart His will.

Father God, Thank you for the freedom we find in You. Thank you for providing scripture to reveal Your will for how we are to live our lives in Your grace. Thank you that You are with us when we make good decisions and bad ones. Thank you for using all our decisions to accomplish Your will on earth. Thank you for being more infinite than our minds can comprehend. Amen.

Reflection: Read back through the above Scriptures. What are practical ways you can encourage your student to live the will of God in day-to-day choices?

What are practical ways you can show your student freedom in Christ through the way you live and make choices?
With great struggle, we send our children out into the world to fulfill God’s call on their lives. With great comfort, we do so knowing that Union University is a community of faith whose primary focus is the furtherance of the gospel through the preparation of students for a ministry of service.

Lord, grant us peace knowing that our child is preparing for a lifetime of service to church and society. May we commit to pray for and encourage our child as he/she seeks your direction.

For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.
1 Samuel 1:27-28 (ESV)

Most of us can recall fervent prayers for the gift of children and prayers that God would save these gifts and use them for the expansion of His Kingdom on this earth. In 1 Samuel, we see Hannah’s fulfillment of her promise to God for His provision of a son. We read this text and struggle with her decision to leave her child with Eli, the priest, to be prepared for service to the Lord. While most parents will not find themselves in such a situation, we find ourselves in a similar state as we turn to head home from the University after we have left our child in the care of another. While an extremely difficult move on our part, our encouragement and strength comes from knowing that he/she is beginning preparation for a lifetime of ministry.

At Union University, students do more than simply earn a degree or prepare for a career; they prepare for a lifetime of service to Jesus Christ and His Church. Often times, we feel that in order to truly serve God we must be in the ministry in direct service to the church or serving as a missionary in some distant land. While these are great callings, God calls most of us to areas of service outside of the church. At Union we prepare future biologists, economists, business leaders, chemists, nurses, pharmacists, teachers, writers, and mathematicians (to name but a few) to serve their disciplines well and to make a difference for the Kingdom of God in the process. Our children have been called to pursue truth in all things. At Union, they will be guided in this pursuit and mentored along the way. They will be challenged and encouraged. They will be celebrated and corrected. They will be developed into young men and women prepared for a lifetime of service to Christ.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

...
Homesickness
Karen Taylor

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:3

Can you remember back to a time (not so long ago) when your student was sick of home? When they sought any way to get out of the house to hang out with friends? Can you remember the times they walked around home exclaiming that they were so “bored” and wished that home was more exciting? You have probably, on some level, experienced this scenario with your student. Some students are ready to tackle the world; they have had the opportunity to travel in high school or stay at summer camp. Others will probably have a harder time adjusting.

I can remember back to several times in college when I literally cried myself to sleep. I had not received a failing grade on a test, experienced a bad break up or had a fight with a roommate - I was just homesick. The strange thing was that my parents only lived fifteen minutes away. Many times I felt lonely, worried, or just plain tired. I needed the comforts of home, a home cooked meal, and my mother’s arms around me telling me that everything would be okay. There were just times that I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders, and I was not prepared to handle it.

The homesickness that I felt was for the things that had been normal and secure in my life. I longed for my “comfort zone” and the warm feeling of knowing that my family was close. The feelings that I felt are very much normal for many college students. College can be a difficult transition, and for some students this is their first time being away from home for an extended period of time. Your student may get discouraged and sad about being away from home, but there is definitely encouragement that you can offer your son or daughter.

- Encourage your student to become involved in campus life, make new friends, and find a family away from home.
- Be sure to keep good contact with your student, scheduling regular phone calls.
- Send care packages or order a “Finals Week Goodie bag” (through SIFE).
- Encourage them to get involved in a local church. Many churches have Watch Care families that “adopt” your child while they are here at Union.
- Don’t burden your students with concerns you have about them being at school. For example, don’t constantly tell them that you just don’t know how you are going to pay for their education or how much you wish they were at home.
- And most importantly – don’t remodel their room! Give them a comfortable place to come home to on breaks.

More than likely, your student will experience at least some homesickness while at college. They will need you once again in ways that you probably did not imagine. They will need your wisdom, your care, and most of all your love. (A box of homemade brownies is often helpful, too!) Do not be discouraged and think that your job is now over because your child has left for college. In many ways, it is just beginning. (My own mother would probably agree.) You have spent many years preparing them to be independent, but you can smile and know that even if they seem ready to let go, they will probably be back for a visit soon. Be prepared with open arms, good advice, and some warm chocolate chips cookies.

Lord, please prepare me so that I will be able to offer comfort to my child. I pray that you will strengthen me so that I can be prepared to give good advice and a loving embrace. Help my student find a sense of belonging at Union so that he or she will find a family away from home. Let the advice and love I give be honoring and glorifying to you. Thank you for the comfort that only you can give.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. Luke 10:27a

"E"verything." That’s what it means to follow Jesus, to live the Christian life; it means that everything we have and everything we are belongs to God and is devoted to him. For all Christians everywhere, Jesus reaffirms Moses’ command that followers of God love the Lord our God holistically, with all that we are, every aspect of our being (Deut. 6:5). This is no easy task, no light duty, but this is the mission of every individual who answers to the name, “Christian.”

At Union University, we have taken to heart Jesus’ command and we have made it our mission to help our students resist the temptation to compartmentalize their faith. In our Western context, the prevailing inclination is to isolate Christian beliefs to “spiritual” activities - to attend a church service for the glory of God but do everything else with other motives and glories in mind.

Here at Union, we combat this notion by being an academic institution that trains students through the integration of faith and learning. Students learn to think about every subject in a distinctively Christian way. They learn how their gospel-centered faith informs and connects to history, philosophy, science, languages, music, technology, and every other subject they will study.

The call to live a life of holistic devotion to God can be overwhelming, especially in the college context. It can take a lot of time and effort. It is my hope that the four years your student will spend here at Union University will bear fruit for the rest of your student’s life. As your student wrestles with integrating what they believe about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ with every nook, cranny, and corner of their life, they are going to need your help and especially your prayer.
Praying for Your Student’s Spiritual Growth

George H. Guthrie

May our sons flourish in their youth like well-nurtured plants. Psalm 144:12a

I love the seasonal nature of university life. The slow turn of each year—with the distinct feel, colors, sounds, and smells of each season—lends a wonderful, throbbing rhythm to our community’s days. Of the seasons, fall and spring are my favorites. Fall, because the heat and humidity of August give way to the cool crisp air and vibrant colors of October. Spring, because as an avid gardener I love to get my hands in the dirt and see things grow. I come by this naturally. You should see my mom’s rose garden! My granddad was the happiest man in town when he had a nice, big load of cow manure to put on his garden beds! I have seen pictures of my great-grandma’s sprawling perennial garden, with blooms galore. In other words, my love of gardening is in the genes.

This year we harvested gallons and gallons of blueberries (easy to grow, and there is nothing like just-picked blueberries on cereal in the morning), figs for eating and drying, raspberries, apples, tomatoes, squash, peppers, eggplant, beans, peas, lettuce, and asparagus. As I planted the blueberries and asparagus a number of years ago, I took time to prepare the soil. I tilled it extensively. I added lime to raise the PH for the asparagus, organic fertilizer (we are trying to get away from chemicals), and organic matter, and the asparagus will get mulch, because weeds and grass grow much too easily. Left to themselves, weeds will choke the life out of the good plants. With the blueberries, I used an acidic fertilizer, since blueberries love an acid soil. Yet, given room to grow, small doses of fertilizer, a steady flow of water, and plenty of sunlight, these wonderful expressions of God’s creativity produce impressively and tickle the taste buds.

One of my favorite parenting passages is Ps. 144:12a, which reads, “May our sons flourish in their youth like well-nurtured plants” (NLT). At Union, we are committed to providing an atmosphere in which your student can thrive spiritually. The transition from childhood to adulthood is tough. As you may have experienced yourself, there are plenty of weeds to choke out spiritual sensitivity and stunt spiritual growth. Specifically, Jesus mentioned worries, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for things (Mark 4:19). Also, hard or shallow hearts—analogue in Jesus’ parable to soil that is not well prepared—are not conducive to a dynamic walk with God (Mark 4:15-17). Yet, Union will provide many opportunities for weeding, watering, feeding, and fruitfulness.

Lord please help my student to flourish like a well-nurtured plant this semester. I pray that he/she will take advantage of opportunities to be fed spiritually and to be confronted when “weeds” sprout up. May his/her heart be soft toward You, like well-prepared soil, and may You grow him/her up to be wonderfully productive in the advancement of Your kingdom.

Tip: Even though you may want him/her to come home often, encourage your son/daughter to find a church home in the Jackson area as soon as possible. Regular meeting with and ministering in the church is vital to one’s spiritual life, and that important community of faith will be vital for his/her growth.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

52
A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word! Proverbs 15:23

I’m thankful to say that all three of our children graduated from Union more than a few years ago. One would think that being on the same campus each day would lead to seeing each other quite often. One would think, but that didn’t happen! In fact, their visits to my office were few and far between—and that was a good thing since it indicated that they were involved in the whole college experience! Having easy access to a parental ear occasionally did lead to their dropping by my office to talk briefly before or after class. I vividly remember each time one of our daughters would enter my office with a look of excitement mixed with wariness. She would start talking about a new venture that she had thought about pursuing upon graduating. Several of her ideas were very good, sound ones. Then, there were a few that, well, were not good ideas as far as I could tell. I was very careful to put on my “interested in what you are saying” face without showing any disagreement or shock. However, inside I found myself screaming! It was only by God’s grace that the screams didn’t burst out. When she would leave my office, I immediately asked God to show her the path that He had for her, regardless of how reasonable or crazy it seemed to me. Several years after she graduated, she told me how helpful my reactions—or lack of reactions—were, as they allowed her to think and pray through each one and figure it out on her own.

Proverbs 15:23 says, “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!”

Sometimes with our college-aged children that “apt reply” is talking to our Lord about a situation instead of giving our children our advice. College years are a time for students to explore new ideas, to think about old ideas more deeply, and to find where their lives fit in the world. It is a time for our children to figure out how to prepare for the next chapter
Let us pray together that our students will continually seek to submit their heart, soul, mind, and strength to the only kingdom ever truly worth the name. May Jesus be real both to us and to our children.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

The Christian faith is fundamentally different from the other religions of the world. It is different because it has a foothold in the stuff of history by virtue of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. My prayer for your student and for my own children is that they will stand on the rock of the resurrection as they encounter the skepticism, cynicism, and mocking contempt of the world.

Paul’s brief sermon to the men of Athens at the Areopagus is a scriptural jewel. It is directly relevant to our immediate experience. Just as we do, he faced a surrounding culture that was incredulous before the claims of Christianity. But Paul boldly entered their debating society, took notice of their statue “to an unknown god” and told them about God as he had encountered him. It is notable that Paul founded his claims upon God “having furnished proof to all men by raising Him (Jesus) from the dead.” According to Paul (and the gospels), many people saw Jesus alive after his death.

His corpse was never found. The truth of Christianity depends on that empty tomb. Encourage your student (as I will, given the chance) to believe in Jesus Christ because of the resurrection. The resurrection was and is a form of proof.

Because the resurrection of Jesus happened in real time and space, we should see the kingdom of Christ as something real as well. Let us hope that our students will put their trust in Christ as king and will choose to spend their lives as servants in his kingdom. We have the hope of heaven before us, but we also have a calling in this life.
The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Proverbs 16:9

In August of 2010, my family and I made the 9 hour drive down to Union University from the Chicago area. “You’re coming back after you graduate, right?” my mom asked. “Of course,” I answered. “I could never settle down south. Don’t worry. I will move back to Illinois once I graduate.” Needless to say, I now live and work in Tennessee…. The Lord’s way for my life was different than my parents or I ever planned. Thankfully, he stopped what we planned from happening.

Proverbs 16:9 used to be my least favorite verse in the Bible. Any time my plans went awry, my dad would come up to me and say, “The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” I would roll my eyes and think, Does God really want to mess me up like that? Wouldn’t it be better to have things go the way I want? While my questions were silly, most of us would be lying if we said we never felt the same way and ask those same questions.

The truth is that we often don’t think God actually has the best plan. We think that our own way is the way that is best. When God doesn’t use our plans, we assume he doesn’t have our best interest at heart. Romans 8:28, the verse that tells us God works all things together for good, is a wonderful verse to quote but a difficult one to apply. Do we really believe that God’s plan is better than ours? Even more so, do you believe that God’s plan is better for your child than your own plan for them?

One of the interesting things about Proverbs is that it is written from a father to a son. The very nature of the book is parental. The care that the writer has for his son is evident. There are 31 chapters devoted to helping his son become wise. His son would eventually grow, encountering new things in life and learning what it meant to be “grown up”. I don’t claim to know what the writer was thinking as he said, “The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps,” but I imagine that he took great comfort in the thought that God would put his child where he needed to be in life in order to become wise. Maybe the father didn’t always get God’s plan for his son. Maybe the father would plan things differently for his son than God would. But, the truth is that God would establish the steps of the son, and the Lord’s plan was much wiser than any plan the father had for the son.

At times, having your child away from you will be difficult. Maybe they will return home after graduating. Maybe they won’t. But, you can take comfort in the fact that God will guide your child. He loves your child more than you know and he is putting him or her where they need to be to grow in Christ. After all, your job as a parent is to point your son or daughter to Jesus. As you are to live a life to Jesus first and then to your family, so must your son or daughter. God will be with them in whatever may come. The plan may look a bit different than you imagined, but that is the best news you could possibly have.

Whenever I do see my parents again, my mom cries at each goodbye. I know that she and my dad miss me - I miss them too. But, I know now that the tears she cries are more than sadness. Joy is present as well. She takes joy in the person that God has made me to be and is thankful for his plans. My dad still likes to say that the “heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” It took me awhile to be thankful for those words. But, now I know that they are evidence of God’s love to me and my parents.

**Personal Prayer and Reflections**

---

---
—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. 1 Peter 3

In Genesis 12 the Lord told Abram firsthand to uproot his family and move away from everything they knew to a new land. I can only imagine how he relayed that news to his wife, Sarai. In their time the thought of moving away from the security and stability of one’s homeland, familial ties and gods—who were traditionally thought to be geographically contained—was radical, especially moving to a land already possessed by another people group.

Up until this point, you’ve probably made most of life’s tough decisions for your child. You’ve decided when and if your family should relocate, which extracurricular activities they’d participate in, and which church your family would attend. But now it’s your child’s turn to make a decision and your job is to offer godly wisdom and then trust that the Lord is leading them. Depending on your family dynamics and relationship with your child, this might be quite a paradigm shift! You watched your baby take their first steps and now they’re stepping out on their own….

— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.

I’m sure Sarai trusted her husband Abram, but even more so her faith rested in the God that they followed. Likewise, as you’re trusting your college student to make a wise and prayer-filled choice for college, trust the Lord to lead them even as they move to a new land.

Having a gentle and quiet spirit is a work of divine intervention. Invite the Holy Spirit to begin that work in you! So whether your child’s first semester goes smoothly or is a rough one, you can be characterized by your hope in the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to increase your faith that you might believe in the Lord’s sovereignty over your child decision-making. Ask him to quiet your spirit such that by faith you wouldn’t fear, even the things that are frightening.

Personal Prayer and Reflections
God and step aside so that He can fully captivate your son or daughter—mind, body, and spirit. For, it is only He who can be a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. Simply let go and love God so much that you can die daily to the goals and dreams you have for your son or daughter so that God can take full control of his or her life as He calls your student to Him.

Yes, remain available to advise and encourage your student, especially when the journey becomes overwhelming. But remember that God has already gifted your son or daughter; He is preparing your student to serve Him, and it just may not be in the profession that you had planned. So, encourage your student to follow Christ in all things—academically, socially, emotionally, professionally, individually, culturally, and spiritually. Encourage your student into letting go of what sounds like a great career and loving God enough to pursue his or her highest calling according to His purpose.

**Romans 8:28 encourages all believers through the reassurance that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (KJV)**

Vocation or calling is central to the conversations I have daily with students to seek God’s purpose. As I work with them to discover their uniqueness and God’s calling on their lives, I consistently encounter anxious hearts and minds uncertain of their purpose. The unknown, is, at times, too daunting a concept with which to grapple.

As a parent, I know that you are also anxious about your student’s future. And yet, you are probably even more anxious about letting go. I, too, was anxious when my oldest daughter entered Union back in the fall of 2006. Although I was on campus with her, I still felt great angst about her future success, but perhaps more overwhelming was my sense of loss—my little girl was not a little girl anymore; she was now a young woman ready to write a new chapter (without me) and find her calling in life. I had to love God enough to let go. And once I accepted the fact that I had done what God had required of me to do as a loving parent in training her up in the way that she should go, I had to be ready and willing to trust Him to guide and direct her through the challenges and joys of pursuing her goals and dreams through the leading of Christ. What a blessing it was to witness her journey!

Every day I speak into the lives of Union students compelling them to earnestly seek God’s call. But, when it came time for me to encourage my own daughter to do this, I, at times, allowed my own dreams for her to get in the way. My consistent encouragement to students is to let go and love God. Hence, this is also my encouragement to you as a parent of a son or daughter entering Union this fall. You, too, must let go of the personal dreams you have for your son or daughter and love God enough to allow Him to whisper to your sons or daughter’s heart His will for his or her life. Trust God and step aside so that He can fully captivate your son or daughter—mind, body, and spirit. For, it is only He who can be a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. Simply let go and love God so much that you can die daily to the goals and dreams you have for your son or daughter so that God can take full control of his or her life as He calls your student to Him.

Yes, remain available to advise and encourage your student, especially when the journey becomes overwhelming. But remember that God has already gifted your son or daughter; He is preparing your student to serve Him, and it just may not be in the profession that you had planned. So, encourage your student to follow Christ in all things—academically, socially, emotionally, professionally, individually, culturally, and spiritually. Encourage your student into letting go of what sounds like a great career and loving God enough to pursue his or her highest calling according to His purpose.

**Personal Prayer and Reflections**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---
If you read from the beginning of chapter 3 Solomon is talking about how there is a time for everything. A time for birth and death, weeping and laughing, war and peace and I would add a time for transition. That’s what liminal space is, it’s place where we find ourselves in the gaps between where we came from and where we are going. The Israelites in the desert is a great example of liminal space. We all recognize college as a place to pass through, and not a place to stay, and with that comes a lot of chances for growth.

I believe that parents play a huge role in that growth, because you have the experience to speak into the lives of your students. When students can’t turn to each other for solid guidance (because they are all in liminal space together), they will come to you with questions. These will not always be easy questions, but they are opportunities for you to show them the love of Christ through your listening and advice. Remember that it is God who is sanctifying your student, and bringing them through their liminal space. Pray for your student, and when God gives you the opportunity to speak to your student about the place where they are, take a moment to remember your times of transition. I believe God can use your experiences to speak grace to your student.
Father, give me the courage to trust You with the most precious thing You have given me, my child. Thank you for entrusting me with this child, for your never ending love and for your purposeful direction. Thank you for where my child and I have been and for where you have yet to take us.

Personal Prayer and Reflections

The Common Murre or Common Guillemot (Uria aalge) is a type of bird known as an auk. God gave them a circumpolar (around the poles of the earth) distribution and a sea-faring existence, occurring along the Arctic waters of the North-Atlantic and the North Pacific. They hunt at sea, only coming to shore to establish colonial nesting sites on rocky ledges along the water’s edge. They have only one mate (monogamous) and produces a single egg. They nest in densely-packed colonies (called loomeries) that offer nurture and protection for the young. Their eggs would most certainly be rolled over the edge was it not for the egg’s God-given design. It tapers to a point on one end and any movement of the egg simply results in its pivoting around that single point. Protected by the loomeries, an additional aspect of God’s provision, the young will one day launch themselves toward the purpose God has ordained for their life.

Matthew 10:29-33 says “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

It is comforting for me, and should be for you, to know that God watches over and provides for all His creatures. So don’t be afraid! Your children are nestled in God’s design, shaped by His purpose and nurtured by His love. A Godly foundation, like the tapered end of the Murre’s egg, will allow your ‘offspring’ to roll with the temptations of this world yet pivot around the teachings of Christ. It is part of God’s plan for all of creation that offspring will one day, just as in the illustration of the auk, launch themselves from the nest, catch the wind God puts beneath their wings and sail toward their place in life. From the loomery of your home to the extended loomery of Union your children are following their individual path of service in God’s Kingdom; they are “worth more than many sparrows.” Do not be afraid!
Contributors

Hunter Baker, J.D., Ph.D. serves as Dean of Instruction and Associate Professor of Political Science. He and his wife Ruth have two children, Andrew and Grace. He is the winner of the 2011 Michael Novak Award conferred by the Acton Institute which has been rated as one of the top global think tanks.

Ashley Fitch Blair is an assistant professor of Communication Arts. She coordinates the Public Relations major and serves as the faculty advisor for the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter, faculty director of Bulldog Communication Group, and chair of the university’s Faculty Development Committee. She fuels her academic passions with a personal one, home roasting and brewing coffee. Ashley is married to fellow Union professor, Chris Blair. They have two children, affectionately referred to by students and alum as the Mini-Blairs.

Jonathan Boyd serves as an Enrollment Counselor in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. He graduated from Union University in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Jonathan is also a deacon at City Fellowship Baptist Church here in Jackson. He and his wife, Sara, have been married since 2013.

Julie Bradfield serves as the Director of Student Mobilization. Prior to coming to work at Union in 2005, Julie served with the International Mission Board in Germany as a Journeyman ministering to German university students in a key college town. Julie now provides direction for Union’s Global Opportunities Program and other initiatives promoting global engagement. She coordinates approximately 15 GO Trips each year and trains leaders and students who participate in GO Trips. Her heart for college students and mobilization play a key role as she also serves as a resource for students who are interested in domestic and international ministry opportunities.

Todd Brady serves as Vice President for University Ministries. A graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Todd has served as pastor in several churches and leads Union’s efforts to serve churches and meet students where they are in their relationship with God so that they might take the next steps toward a life that connects fully with God’s global purpose. He and Amy have been married since 1999 and have five sons.

Jason Castles is the Assistant Dean of Students, Director of Student Leadership and Engagement, and teaches in the College of Education. He received his undergraduate and doctoral degrees from Union and his master’s degree from the University of Southern Florida. Jason enjoys working with students as they utilize the gifts with which God has equipped them and assisting them as they translate what they are learning in the classroom to their place of involvement on campus and in the community. He and his wife, Jessica, are expecting their first child in September.

Bryan Carrier currently serves as the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students. In this role he strives to create an engaging and intentional educational atmosphere where students have the opportunity to encounter God, experience community and engage culture. Bryan is blessed with a wonderful wife, Tricia. Together they have two sons Clayton and Trent. They count it a privilege to do ‘life together’ with the students, faculty and staff of Union University.

Dan Griffin is the Vice President for Enrollment Management. He has been involved with enrollment services since 1999. Prior to coming to Union in 2015, he served at Toccoa Falls College, Moody Bible Institute, and Columbia International University. Dan and his wife, Christina, have five children: Caleb, Faith, Annabeth, Seth, and Jacob.

Georgie Guthrie serves as Union’s Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible in the Department of Christian Studies. He is the author of numerous articles and 5 books, including the Homan Guide to interpreting the Bible (co-authored with Dr. David Dockery), the NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews, and the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary on Hebrews. He and his wife Pat have two children, Joshua and Anna.

Rhonda Hudson, PhD, LCSW, serves as a Professor of Social Work and BSW Director in the School of Social Work. She teaches in the BSW and MSW programs in Jackson and in Germantown. She is also a certified Quality Matters Peer Reviewer for online courses at Union University and at other universities. She is a board member for Area Relief Ministries, Inc., Coordinator for Room in the Inn Homeless Ministry and on the Praise Team at Northside Assembly of God. She is the mother of Percy, Ronald and Ryan.

Tamarin Huelin has been counseling since 1994 in both inpatient as well as outpatient settings and serves as Director of Counseling in Union’s Counseling Services. She has an undergraduate degree in Recreation Therapy from the University of North Carolina, a Masters in Counseling from Georgia State University and a diploma in Christian Counseling from the Psychological Studies Institute (now Richmond University). Her counseling employers have included Minirth Meier New Life (now Meier Clinics) in Atlanta and Chicago and Lutheran Social Services in Indiana. She and her husband, Scott, also worked in Residence Life at the University of Chicago. Tamarin and Scott have two sons, Jeremy and Cameron.

James Huggins is University Professor of Biology, Director of the Union Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Pastor at Unity Baptist Church in Jacks Creek, TN.

Renée M. Jones, M.B.A. currently serves as the Director of the Hundley Center for Academic Enrichment and previously served in the Vocatio Center for Life Calling and Career/Career Services for 14 years and obtained certification as a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) administrator. She is a two-time graduate of Union University with her Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science/Accounting and her Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.). She is passionate about empowering others to identify & utilize their talents, gifts, potential, and life calling while preparing them academically for success and to become change agents for Christ in the spirit of excellence. Renée is blessed to be married to Elder Paul Jones, Sr. who serves locally as the Pastor of New Vision Church. Paul and Renée have been married for 16 years with two sons and giants for the Kingdom, Paul Jr. (10) and Ethan (4).
Dan Lancaster serves as the Assistant Vice President for University Ministries. He is a graduate of Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and received his PhD with a concentration in Church History and Missions from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His family served in Southeast Asia as missionaries of the International Mission Board for 12 years. Dan and Holli recently celebrated 30 years of marriage and have four children: Jeff, Zach, Karis, and Zane.

Beth Madison is a wife, mother of two sons, and faculty member in the Continuing Studies department at Union.

Matthew Marshall serves in the Office of University Ministries as the Director of Service and Diversity Initiatives and the Center for Reconciliation. He also serves as an Elder at City Fellowship Baptist Church in downtown Jackson. Matthew and his wife Rachel have two daughters, Arianna and Anora, and one son, Elias.

Chris Mathews (’95) and his wife, Leslie (’96) returned to their alma mater in 2008 for Dr. Mathews to take the role of Chairman of the Department of Music. He earned degrees in choral conducting from Southwest Missouri State University and the University of Kentucky before teaching at Clemson University in South Carolina. He and Leslie recently celebrated 20 years of marriage and are joyfully raising three beautiful daughters: Ellen, Becca and Natalie.

Paul Mayer served in the US Army in South Korea, and then the Middle East during Desert Storm. After returning home from the war, he decided his call was to healing and so became a registered nurse in 1993. As a nurse he has worked in a variety of roles including intensive care nursing, ER/trauma, hospice and home health. He began working as the school nurse for Union in 2005. He graduated with a Master’s degree in Nursing as a Family Nurse Practitioner from Union University in 2011. Paul is married to Kim and together they have a son, John. They are members of West Jackson Baptist Church. Paul also has a son, Mike, a daughter, Grace, and a grandson, Jackson. He enjoys raising chickens, turkeys, miniature horses, and miniature goats, as well as, building and engineering things around his little farm. Paul is grateful.

C. Ben Mitchell is Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs and holds the Graves Chair of Moral Philosophy. Among other volumes, he is the author of Ethics and Moral Reasoning: A Student’s Guide (Crossway, 2012) and with D. Joy Riley, MD, Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families (B&H, 2015). He is a graduate of Mississippi State University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and received his PhD in philosophy with a concentration in medical ethics from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Dottie Myatt is the Assistant Dean for Teacher Education and Accreditation and Professor of Elementary Education. Her husband, Sam, retired from Union after 28 years of service, and all three of their children (Bill Myatt, Lili Tankersley, and Janie Williams) graduated from Union. Dr. Myatt serves on the Teacher Education Board of Examiners of the TN Department of Education and has held several leadership roles in state and national teacher education organizations. She was selected as the 2007 Faculty of the Year at Union.

Ray Van Neste (’92) and his wife, Tammie (’92) returned to their alma mater in 2001. Dr. Van Neste serves as Professor of Biblical Studies in the School of Theology and Missions and as Director of the R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies. He earned his PhD in New Testament from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, and his published works include the study notes on 1-2 Timothy and Titus in the ESV Student Bible and, along with C. Richard Wells, Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship (B&H, Fall 2012). He and Tammie recently celebrated 22 years of marriage and have six children, the oldest of whom is a sophomore this year at Union.

Mary Anne Poe is Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Social Work and Director of the Center for Just and Caring Communities. She was the 2009 Faculty of the Year. Her husband, Dr. Hal Poe, is the Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture at Union and they have two daughters who are Union alumnae.

Anna Singleton currently serves as Associate Dean of the School of Education. Her 30+ year tenure at the university, coupled with her role as a mother of two children who had very different college experiences, gives her a well-rounded perspective of university life. She has coauthored a textbook, Teaching Mathematics at All Levels and was recognized as Union University 2003 Faculty of the Year.

Karen Taylor serves as the Associate Director of Student Leadership and Engagement. She is a 2001 graduate of Union University with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She is also a graduate of Dallas Baptist University where she received the M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration. Karen works with a variety of student organizations on campus, and especially enjoys working with freshman students.

Jacqueline Taylor joined Union University in November 2000 and currently serves as the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of the Vocatio Center for Life Calling and Career. Dr. Taylor holds the EdD in Educational Leadership with a specialization in Higher Education Administration, MA in Education, and BA in English from Union University. Equipped with 25+ years of higher education experience and certification in MBTI assessment and interpretation, Dr. Taylor truly enjoys working with college students, both inside and outside of the classroom, in order to help them to discover their giftedness and the opportunities available to help them live out their unique life calling in service to others. In addition to providing leadership and administrative oversight to the Vocatio Center for Life Calling and Career as well as the Hundley Center for Academic Enrichment, Dr. Taylor has especially enjoyed instructing UNI-201: P.A.C.E. (Personalized Academic Career Exploration), a course designed and implemented based on her doctoral research and analysis of college student success. Founder of MOSAIC, Union’s multicultural student organization, Dr. Taylor has also enjoyed teaching special interest classes to build community, including Christian Perspectives on Education, Race, & Justice and The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement. Ultimately, Dr. Taylor believes in and works towards holistic student advocacy and success initiatives which encourage students to embrace God’s call through the leading and guiding of Christ in every aspect of their lives.

Dr. Taylor is married to her husband of 25 years, Earnest Taylor, and they have two wonderful daughters, Cecily and Adrienne. She is also a committed Sunday School Teacher for New Life In Christ Ministries in Lexington, TN.
Melanie Taylor ('13) serves in the Office of University Ministries as the Ministry Coordinator. Melanie is pursuing an MA in Intercultural Studies where she will study the complexities of race, faith and culture. She is also an active member of City Fellowship Baptist Church in Jackson.

Fran Thomas is the Scholarship Coordinator within Student Financial Planning. She graduated from Arkansas State University in 1992. She and her husband Chip married in 1994 and together they have 3 teenage boys. She is actively involved in Women’s Ministry and the choir at Englewood Baptist Church. Fran also has a nonprofit ministry, “More than a Mission Trip,” that raises money for mission trips, encourages other women to follow God wherever He leads them, and financially supports other local and global ministries. Fran loves spending time with her family, traveling to the beach, serving in other countries, and sitting for hours over coffee laughing and talking about life.

Sherry Tignor comes to Union after 25 years in secondary education serving as a classroom teacher, guidance counselor and middle and upper school administrator. She holds a Bachelor of Science from Union University and Master of Education in Guidance with additional graduate studies from the University of Memphis. Sherry has served at Union for 20 years working with incoming freshman students and the past 10 years developing and giving leadership to the Keystone program. Sherry and her husband Barry have a daughter and son-in-law, Holly and Gary Johnson. They are the proud grandparents of Miles.

Rusty Tuders graduated from Union University with a degree in Theology and Missions. Rusty is the Assistant Residence Director for the Heritage complex. He and his wife Susan have been married since January 2014 and, together, they lead the Youth ministry at City Fellowship Baptist Church in Jackson.

Blake Watkins is Professor and Chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences. Prior to coming to Union, Dr. Watkins worked as a Research Scientist and later as a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Mississippi. He was also heavily involved in curricular development for the Regents School of Oxford, working to develop and implement a solid, classically Christian science and math curriculum, emphasizing “hands-on” learning with the goal of instilling a deep love for creation and its Creator. He and his wife, Lisa, have two sons, Daniel and Matthew.

Lee Wilson serves as the Director of Discipleship at Union University. Prior to joining the University Ministries staff in January of 2008, Lee earned a BA in English Literature at Texas A&M and a Masters of Divinity at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Lee oversees programs that minister to students at Union. Lee is married to his lovely wife, Beth, and together they have two children, Abigail and Liam.