

ENCOURAGING

31 day devotional for parents
of new Union students



August 2016

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

Save the Date

September 30 – October 1



www.uu.edu/events/familyweekend

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DAY
1

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 of 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 it’s 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

DAY
4

Be Strong and Courageous

Dan Lancaster

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

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

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

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

When 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.

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

Demystifying the Will of God

Ashley Fitch Blair

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8 NIV

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-39 NIV

The will of God. Especially for those of us who grew up in the church, these words simultaneously can be very powerful and can become a cliché. For some "the will of God" becomes a vaguely spiritual justification for personal choices that is difficult for others to refute. After all, who can really argue with "the will of God?!" "I believe it is the will of God that we break up" "I feel it's God's will for me to serve Him at the beach" And the one I hear most often as a professor, "I believe it's the Lord's will for me to drop this class." (Amazingly, it is rarely the will of God for anyone to add a class.)

For others the will of God is deeply meaningful. Students often come into my office to discuss their future, and these conversations are steeped in a sincere desire to know and follow the will of God. What I've realized in these conversations is that students often regard the "will of God" as a mysterious unknown, like a series of riddles that must be solved to unlock points on a map and that any misstep could result in being outside the will of God. The pressure this mindset creates is astounding. The anxiety of making a wrong choice can be crippling.

I believe one of the greatest reminders we can provide is that the will of God for our lives is not a mystery. The will of God for each of us is spelled in out Scripture.

- It is God's will for me to act justly.
- It is God's will for me to love mercy.
- It is God's will for me to walk humbly with God.

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?

Prepared for His Service

Blake Watkins

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.

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.

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 hardertimeadjusting.

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

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—analogous 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

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

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 10 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 South 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.

Reneé 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. Reneé is blessed to be married to Elder Paul Jones, Sr. who serves locally as the Pastor of New Vision Church. Paul and Reneé 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 Children 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.