

# ENCOURAGING

30-Day Devotional for Parents  
of New Union Students



**August 2025**

Dear Union Moms and Dads,

We are grateful that God has led us to today. Understanding that days like Move In Day are wonderful and fun, fulfilling some of our hopes for our children, and also incredibly hard, acknowledging that a very significant transition has happened (the child who was sleeping under your roof earlier this week will be sleeping in a new “home” tonight). Days like today cause us to praise God... and to ask Him for His grace for all that lies ahead.

We hope you are blessed by this devotional. Written by our faculty, staff, students and alumni, we trust that the Lord will use it in the days ahead to draw you closer to Him and to help you get to know our hearts better as well. God’s Word is precious to us. We believe that all of life and learning is established on it. God’s Word will stand forever (*Isaiah 40:8*). Thus, we turn to it for divine instruction for the living of our days.

The mission of Union University is to provide Christ-centered education that promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society. As your son or daughter experiences this education designed to fit them for the Kingdom of Christ and the world we inhabit, we hope that you will be encouraged by what you see blossoming in them.

Let’s covenant to pray for one another and for our students as we pursue Christ-exalting academic excellence. As we journey together in the days ahead, remember that we are in this together and please don’t hesitate to call on any of us.

Faithfully,

Dr. Dub  
President

# Save the Date

September 26-27, 2025



[www.uu.edu/events/familyweekend](http://www.uu.edu/events/familyweekend)

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DAY  
1

## Where It All Begins

**Addison Neely, Student**

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **Romans 8:26***

Seems like a strange and depressing verse to open a devotional with, right? But if you are being honest with yourself this verse might encapsulate your feelings towards leaving your student at college. While these might be feelings you are not proud of, whether that's sadness, anxiety, or even a little jealousy, they are all emotions the Lord knows are there. Most of these feelings come out of a place of love and concern for them as well, and the Lord also sees that. However, the question is, what will you do with these feelings?

**Romans 8:26** tells us that the Spirit himself is interceding for us—what a relief! This means that when we are having those thoughts, worries, and emotions that we don't know how to express to God, the Spirit is already there speaking on our behalf. He's helping make known our weaknesses and shortcomings, and in what ways we need the Lord's strength to get us through. Leaving your student at school is no easy task, I can only imagine every small and large worry, concern, and frustration you might already be experiencing. But have you given them over to the Lord? Letting them sit and fester in your heart, instead of admitting it as a weakness is only going to hurt you more, and potentially even your student. Instead, let the Spirit do what the Spirit does—intercede.

Some of you, if you are really vulnerable with yourself, might even be wanting your student to have a rough time in college so at the end of the day you will still feel needed and wanted by them. You might be hoping they want to come home on the weekends because they miss you and miss home, but is that really what's best for the student, or is that what's most comfortable for you? Our weaknesses of the flesh can be right under our noses, but sometimes we cover it up under the identity of just a "concerned parent" or some other role, without even realizing it. It is important that you ask the Lord to search your heart and

call out any selfish motivations you might have when it comes to your student leaving for college. The Spirit wants to help you in your weakness, and He wants to pray for you and intercede for you in ways that you don't know how. This can only begin when you first recognize that you need His help, if you try to control everything on your own, that's not really entrusting your student to the Lord is it? God's not asking you to do anything extreme, like sacrifice your son or daughter like Abraham did with Isaac, He's just simply asking that you entrust them to His care. His care and concern for your student is far greater than yours could ever be, whether you believe that or not.

If you have not already been praying for your student and their time at college, start now. However, even more than that, pray for your own heart and attitude towards them leaving for college. Pray that the Spirit would start interceding on your behalf now. Whether that's in wordless groans, or shouts of "Thank you Jesus!" allow your weaknesses to be lifted to the Lord so that you might know how to best continue to counsel, guide, and even step back at times when caring for your student. Let the Spirit express the hidden thoughts and feelings that you don't know how to admit. The Lord just wants your heart and your student's life surrendered to Him. Leave them at Union with open hands rather than closed fists.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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## Sending Them Forth

***Ray Van Neste, Dean, School of Theology  
& Missions; Professor of Biblical Studies;  
Vice President, University Ministries***

*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. Psalm 127: 3-4*

**I**t 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 to 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 Christ-likeness 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*

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## Lamentations 3:22-23

**Susan Hopper, Registrar**

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentation 3:22-23*

It had been a particularly difficult season of life with more tough days than not, so my husband and I decided to get away for a few days. We drove to the east coast and found ourselves in a small hotel on Jekyll Island. Even though we had only slept a few hours, the Lord woke us early so we strolled to the beach. The sun was barely peeking through the clouds as we stood there with our bare feet on the cool, packed, wet sand and watched in complete silence.

The sights that morning were nothing short of spectacular. The colors went from cool, soft, and peaceful to brilliant, shimmering, and magical. We must have stood there soaking it in for a full hour, speaking very little. Others appeared on the beach, but most watched in silence. There was a sort of understood reverence that was only slightly interrupted by the sounds of gentle waves on the beach.

His mercies are like that. They are peaceful, brilliant, spectacular. And, miraculously, they are new every morning.

The first part of the third chapter in Lamentations speaks to being in a very dark place. The writer, Jeremiah, is surrounded by suffering; he is oppressed, and he is overcome with torment. The Lord has "hedged him in" and has "shut out his cries and his prayers." He is beaten down. His chains are heavy, and his pleas are not being heard. Jeremiah says, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord." That, my friends, is truly a desolate place.

However, in the midst of this aloneness and hopelessness, Jeremiah chooses to remember the Lord. He knows that the Lord is still in his presence and that the Lord is faithful to renew his hope and grant him peace.

*"This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."*

Yesterday may have been hard. Today may bring difficult news or seemingly impossible decisions. Your son or daughter may be homesick or physically exhausted or struggling with a serious

problem. Remind your homesick, tired student that lifetime friends are not made in a day but that at Union those friends will be found, and those friends will be valuable. Pray for godly friends and lift those relationships to the Lord every day.

You may miss your child so much that you feel actual pain. You may be dealing with deep grief. Your child is no longer under your roof every night. You are not going to be making sure that he is "doing his homework" or that she is getting enough rest. Loosen the reins. Will mistakes be made? Will deadlines be missed? Absolutely. But the lessons learned in those instances will be more valuable than you can imagine and will have a long-lasting impact.

Is it going to be hard? Yes, some days will be tough. Some days will be terribly hard. And some days may seem completely impossible. But remember, no matter how much of God's mercy and compassion you need today and no matter how much you needed that same faithfulness and care yesterday, His faithful love never runs out. His love and mercy are new, brand new, every morning. You are not consumed. You have hope.

*He is faithful to make the sun rise, to restore a full measure of mercy  
On the days and in the seasons when it seems impossible to cope  
Step outside and take in the peaceful, magnificent colors of His love  
And hang on to His promise of daily restoration and hope.*

The second morning on that beach in Jekyll Island, the most miraculous thing happened. The sun rose all over again and was just as majestic as the day before.

Step outside. Allow the colors of the Lord to wash over you. Remember that His compassions are miraculous. Rest in Him. Rest assured that the sun will rise, tomorrow will come, the morning will break, and His mercies will be yours in full measure all over again.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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**DAY  
4**

## God Ordains Our Timing

**Jennifer Delk, Associate Professor  
of Nursing and Chair for  
Undergraduate Programs**

The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him.  
*Psalm 37:23*

29 years ago this August, God brought me to Union as an undergraduate student. As a nursing major, I was excited about the path that I was beginning in order to gain knowledge and prepare to enter a profession of service as a nurse. Little did I know at that time that I would return to Union 15 years later as a professor within the College of Nursing.

As I began my career as a nurse, I look back knowing God placed me exactly where He desired me to be. As a new nurse working with cancer patients, I quickly gained a vast amount of wisdom and ability to share compassion while my love for my nursing also grew. God placed patients and families in my path that I was able to minister to, but also that allowed me to grow in my abilities to share His love. Two of those patients were Mr. Charles and Ms. Elizabeth. I cared for both of these individuals for months on end. I spent hours at their bedside learning about their children, grandchildren and meeting their families, while they also shared their love for the Lord. I spent weekends, holidays, mornings, and evenings with both of these patients. There were times that family was present and times where both were lonely. One Monday following Easter in 2000, both Mr. Charles and Ms. Elizabeth passed away as I stood at their bedside ensuring comfort was administered. They just so happened to pass away on the same day. My heart was crushed. As an oncology nurse, I had dealt with death many times, but this time, I had established relationships with both of these individuals.

A few years later, I found myself beginning a new job in a totally different area of the hospital. As a Labor and Delivery nurse, I began to assist families as they brought their new children into the world. Not long after beginning, I found myself working New Year's Eve caring for a patient as she brought her third child into the world. This patient just so happened to be Mr. Charles' daughter. The Lord saw fit that I was present at his

bedside when he passed away, but also present when his final granddaughter entered the world.

Looking back on those years, I'm reassured to know that God had a specific plan for my life. He ordained my steps in not only choosing Union for my education, but also in providing a desire to become a nurse. The Lord opened the door for my position on the oncology floor. The Lord knew I would care for these patients and get to build relationships day in and day out. The Lord placed me in Labor and Delivery years later where I was given the privilege to assist as new life entered the world. Thankfully, the Lord has even allowed the opportunity to return to my alma mater and share my passion for nursing into students.

As parents, it is often hard to "let go and let God" handle these young lives that we brought into the world years ago. Thank goodness for the reassurance that as you leave your child at Union, God has them in His control. As your child attends Union to obtain their faith-based knowledge, you can trust that God has them in His hand. He has their path ordained, and He knows their steps, day in and day out. Just as He knew Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's. Just as he knew Joseph would end up serving Pharaoh, spending time in jail, and saving the country of Egypt. Despite our human efforts to often manipulate these paths, thank God for His omnipotence. Thank God he knew that the student who really didn't care for her Labor and Delivery rotation while in school, would eventually work there for over 21 years. Thank God He is in control, and we can trust in His paths for ourselves and our children.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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**DAY  
5**

## The Guarded Life

**Joe Ball, Executive Director for Student Discipleship and Engagement**

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:7**

"We live in an age of uncertainty."

"Everyone struggles with anxiety."

"People have never been lonelier than they are today."

I do not think I go an entire day without hearing someone use words like "anxiety, worry, fear, uncertainty." We seem to be living in some very interesting days and if you are like me, you are worried about the future, or at least you have been told to worry about the future. One of the passages of scripture I find myself quoting regularly is **Philippians 4**, where the Apostle Paul instructs the church at Philippi to *"Not worry about anything but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* (**Philippians 4:6**) Raise your hand if you can go a single day without worrying about everything... That is what I thought. The reality is that that verse is REALLY impossible to follow, especially if it was the end of that passage. I know some of you right now are worried about whether your student can survive college. You are afraid that they are making good friends. You are concerned if they are taking care of themselves. You are worried about whether you can afford the rising costs of Higher Education (I hope I did not add any extra worry to your day).

When I quote **Philippians 4**, I often forget to remind myself of the end of **verse 8**, where the Apostle Paul assures us that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is not just a promise; it is a light post of hope. I want to be a person who genuinely trusts God in all things. I want to be someone who takes everything to Him. Why is this so hard? Why do I find myself calling out God's name when it seems too late? Worry and anxiety can cause us to be consumed by things that are often out of our control.

Even in our moments of worry, fear, and uncertainty, God's Word stands true, and God is guarding us, protecting us, and

guiding us. Those of us who are "In Christ Jesus" are people who are never alone in our worry. Why? Because we are in Christ Jesus. What a truth to hold onto no matter what comes our way. God is guarding our hearts and our minds.

So what do we do with the worry that comes our way today, tomorrow, and every day? What if we consider it an opportunity to do precisely what the Apostle Paul is reminding the Church of Phillip to do? To trust God. To bring your worries to God. To be reminded that the Lord is near and that God is, in fact, guarding your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Many scholars believe that the Apostle Paul was in prison for his faith. He was unsure if he would live or die. I think there was a good chance that right outside his prison cell was a guard who was making sure Paul did not escape. He was being guarded around the clock, but even Paul knew that it was God who was truly guarding him no matter what happened to him. God was with him, and he never had to be alone.

If Paul can trust God in that kind of uncertainty, so can we! Take your worry to God. He cares for you!

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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## When God Goes With Us

**Amy Eads, Administrative Assistant and Coordinator for Student Life**

College... Just the word can bring out so many thoughts and emotions. It is such a pivotal time in a young person's life. The college years are a time of growth in so many ways. We as parents can just pray that we have taught our children to seek the Lord and follow His ways and trust Him in all things. So many prayers have been prayed over which college your son or daughter should attend and for the Lord to provide a way for them to get there. I am reminded of the time in Exodus when the Israelites have been wandering in the desert, and they are preparing to enter the Promised Land. There are a couple verses in **Exodus 33** that really stand out to me. They go as follows:

*The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Exodus 33:14-15*

I feel these two verses can be applied to so many events in our lives. We may not have been wandering around a desert for 40 years, but we have been deep in the trenches of parenthood for the last 18 years. We have prayed and worried and fought and wrestled and prayed some more. Then, when it comes to letting our children head into the next phase of life, we have to trust that the LORD's Presence will indeed go with them. Oh, that we can feel that rest that He has promised if we just trust in His Presence. What a blessing to know that they are held in the hands of the One who loves them infinitely more than we are able.

Now, as parents, we may feel a shift in our roles in our children's lives. We continue to pray, but it is time to see them grow into the individual that the Lord has designed them to be. There may be some bumps and bruises along the way, but to know that as they continue to pursue the Lord, His presence will continue to go with them. In **verse 17** of the same chapter of Exodus, the LORD responds to Moses by saying, *"I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name."* Wow!! The God of the Universe knows

us by name... He knows your child by name. He will never leave them, and His Presence will go with them. And, in return, His Presence is also with you as you open your arms to let them go but also to welcome them when they come home.

So, encourage your children to look for ways to serve and love those around them. To be fully engaged and enjoy this time in their lives. Then, as they enter into their careers, graduate school, or wherever they head after their time at Union, they will again be reminded that the Lord's Presence will go with them. He will give them rest!

### ***Personal Prayer and Reflections***

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## Bigger Than Our Worry

***Trenton Holloway, Assistant Director of Student Government and Greek Life***

*But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 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. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. **Matthew 6:30-34 (ESV)***

**I**'m a worrier, and I always have been. No matter the scenario, worry can find its way in. While I certainly hope that you cannot relate, I fear that this life has no shortage of things to worry about.

As your family navigates this new season, you may be facing many worries. Whether big or small, these may linger in the far corners of your mind. Will my son or daughter make friends? Will they be successful in their classes? Will they find a community in a local church? Will they make time to study? Who will they eat dinner with tonight?

Often, when my mind is consumed by the “What if’s?” I find that I am giving myself too much credit, and the energy I spend worrying is misplaced. By worrying, I assume that I am in control. I operate as if there is something I can do to prepare for and change my circumstance or influence the outcome. I find I am leaning more on my own understanding than trusting the Lord to care for me and provide for my needs. I often turn to ***Matthew 6:30-34.***

Throughout this passage, Jesus gives several examples of the great love and care God has for His creation. He is a God who provides for the birds, and who beautifully adorns the lilies of the field. *“Are you not of more value than they?” (v.26)* He is a God who knows you, and He loves you. He knows and loves your

student and will care for them as well. He knows what we need before even we do after all, He created us!

While we may be filled with anxious questions, we can find comfort in knowing that God loves us, and He is in control. He will provide for our needs. He tells us to focus our attention on seeking His kingdom and righteousness and trust Him with everything else.

When I begin to feel the weight of my worries, the Lord finds a way to bring me back to the truth of His word, which is bigger than all my worry.

When worries come, as they often do, I pray that you will find strength and comfort in His word to face the uncertainty. Let the birds and the flowers serve as reminders of God's love and care, and how much more He cares for you.

### ***Personal Prayer and Reflections***

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## Transitions

**Stephanie Hawley, Director for  
Institutional Effectiveness, Administrative  
Office of the Provost**

*You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:3-4*

Navigating change can be both exciting and challenging. Even changes we expected, like this change from high school to college, can come with unexpected emotions and results. Your newly minted college student is adjusting to new routines, schedules, concepts, ways of learning and studying, relationships, foods, spaces... and the list goes on. As the parent of a college student, you're also learning to navigate a new normal. Whether your student lives at home or on campus, life isn't quite the same as it was a few months ago.

I used to say that I'm not "allergic to change". In other words, I didn't think I had an adverse reaction to change but instead really tried to embrace it. In my work at Union, I'm often part of initiating change as we evaluate what is going well, what isn't, and how we can improve to better pursue our mission (which does not change). I think change can be a good thing, but it doesn't mean it's not hard or that everyone adjusts well. As I reflect on my own experience with navigating change, I realize how often doubt and worry start to creep in, even amid exciting changes. Change brings something new, and the process is often hard. It can make us question who we are, what we're doing, and if we're going to be alright.

Too often during a season of change, we want to clench our fists and stubbornly try to hold on to what is old and familiar, but navigating change is a reminder that we need to soften our grip and place our hope not in relationships, leaders, political parties, institutions, or other earthly things, but in the one who never changes—in Jesus Christ. When our gaze is fixed on Jesus, the sure and steady anchor for our souls, we find perfect peace even when we must walk through the depths of the darkest valley. When we experience change that threatens our sense of identity, our relationships, our understanding, and our peace, Isaiah

tells us that we can turn to the one who does not change, the everlasting rock, who keeps us in perfect peace when we keep our minds on him and trust in him alone.

So, when (not if) your college student calls or texts about something new, hard, and challenging in this new season: listen, ask good questions, remind them of the truth found in scripture, but resist the urge to fix it immediately. Hold space for your child to wrestle through uncertainty, to struggle with doubt, and even to experience failure, all the while pointing them back to the truth of the Gospel. This season of change is an opportunity for your son or daughter to grow closer to Jesus and to learn to seek the peace that comes from trusting in the Lord, the everlasting rock, through the doubts and uncertainties.

*Lord Jesus, when we experience change that makes us question who we are and what we're supposed to be doing, help us to keep our mind stayed on you, the everlasting rock, in whom we can place our trust. We pray for our college students as they navigate this season of change. Help them to trust in you, to remember that you are good, and that you are the only source of comfort and peace.*

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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## Matthew 11:28-30

**Hayden Phillips, Assistant Director of  
Campus Ministry and Men's Discipleship**

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30*

We carry a lot of titles throughout the years. To name a few for myself, I am currently a husband, son, brother, grandson, cousin, friend, employee, and teacher. In each of these roles, there lies responsibilities, duties, and expectations. Since becoming a new husband, I often think about the expectations that this title carries, and I spend time thinking about how I can actively love my wife just as Christ loves the church. Even though I don't fulfill this role perfectly, I know that there lies a responsibility to pursue. In whatever role it is, we have a responsibility that is met with our own expectations, as well as expectations from others. If you have a personal relationship with Christ, you have the greatest title of all: Christ follower. It is this title that is the most descriptive and most true for those who are in Christ. It is this title of belonging that gives us a purpose in all things and satisfies above all else.

The title of Christ follower changes our perspective on each aspect of our lives. As Christ followers, we are called to live a holy life, a life set apart from that of the world. A struggle for many believers is that, when trying to live according to God's word and pursue the fulfillment of God's purposes, we let the fear of underperformance and failure overcome us. Our fear and uncertainty cause us to miss out on delighting in the Lord. In your role as a parent, you may be seeking answers on how to be obedient during this change. What does obedience look like during this new season? How can I be the best parent for my new college student? Should I be doing more? Should I be doing less? Am I helping? Am I hurting? These are some of the questions that might be taking residence in a busy mind.

Jesus has an answer for those who are burdened by a busy soul seeking unreachable perfection. In the gospel of Mathew, Jesus invites us to himself to receive rest for our burdened souls.

Jesus begins with the commandment, "come to me." During these burdensome times of trying to be perfectly obedient in all things, Jesus himself asks one thing of us: "come to me". Jesus goes on to say in **Matthew 11:28-30**, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jesus offers us rest, and not just physical rest, but rest for our souls. The heart of Jesus is gentle and lowly. He is not only willing, but He is waiting for us to come to Him. He is gentle. He is not waiting to meet us with raging destruction or brute force, but He is waiting to receive us with merciful grace in his wide stretched arms. Our brokenness is not unknown to God. It is in our brokenness that His perfect grace abounds all the more. It is in our brokenness and renewal that His glory is shown. He is lowly. Jesus humbled himself when He took on flesh, and in this way, made himself available to us. It is through the Son that we can know the Father. Find comfort in knowing that the one who offers rest to a wearied soul is available to us. Also, because He was fully man, Jesus faced temptation. However, unlike us, Jesus met temptation with perfection and victory. It is only because of His perfect obedience, death, and resurrection that we can be confident in following Him, for every burden we face has already been defeated.

As your role as a parent changes, look first to your role as a Christ follower. As you seek to grow in your role as a parent, seek first to grow as a Christ follower. As you strive to be the best possible parent for your student, seek first to follow Him. In Jesus, we find rest for our souls. Remember that commandment: "come to me". When the enemy makes you question your value as a parent, remember that your identity lies with Christ. When your role as a parent changes, Christ remains the same. Seek Him. Learn from Him. Find rest for your soul today.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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## He is Able

**Beth Madison, Associate Professor of Science, Adult & Professional Studies**

Despite having three degrees, three published books, and other accolades, I've never been the sharpest knife in the drawer, much less the smartest person in the room. Even my father attributes my achievements to hard work and determination, not a brilliant mind. And that's okay with me.

Because I know that none of this is really mine, nor ever was or will be. It's all grace.

None of us were made for ourselves. All of us were made for God's glory and the good of His people. Not only could we not make ourselves, we can't make good out of ourselves. Only God can. And hallelujah! God does as He promises in **Romans 8:28 NASB**, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" We can rely on the truth that God does as He promises every time with every circumstance, every person, and every situation.

Jeremiah expressed this truth with, "*Almighty LORD, you made heaven and earth by your great strength and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*" **Jeremiah 32:17 GNT**. Many others in the Bible said the same truth. One of the more familiar sayings comes from Paul in **Philippians 4:13 AMP**, "*I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]*" If anybody could claim to be the brightest bulb in a room, it was Paul. But he didn't rely on himself nor what he could do. Rather, he boasted in God because he trusted in God. Like Mary, he'd learned that only God was the One for Whom nothing was impossible (see **Luke 1:37**).

Even though I've thought my sons the brightest and best since before they were born, I know they will face situations they can't solve, circumstances they can't overcome, and people who don't think they're perfect. That knowledge compels me to pray even harder for them to my God, the only One Who is Able to do all things in, through, and for them. So, I pray for them. And I keep praying for them.

For I know these truths:

Only God can give them the endurance for whatever they might encounter.

Only God can give the strength for them to stand in all situations.

Only God can be their hope and help at their right hand.

Only God can redeem and restore them, no matter their resolve to run towards or from truth.

I'm walking-around proof of those statements. I was that prodigal daughter who ran as hard as she could from God during college. But God didn't let go of me nor did my parents who prayed desperately, diligently, and determinedly for me. Their prayers held me then and hold me now. My husband's and my prayers do the same for our sons.

Your prayers for your child/children can bring God's goodness to your children. This good isn't limited by circumstances; it's given by God. Your prayers can impact your children today whether they: live with you or across the world; choose righteousness or running from God; are succeeding at or simply surviving college; or whether they seek what is good or want nothing of God. No one is beyond God's reach. No one is beyond God's redemption. Prayer can change lives for today and for forever.

What's keeping you from relying on God in prayer for your children today?

God doesn't stop listening. God doesn't stop working. God doesn't stop loving. And nothing can stop God.

With this in mind, we shouldn't stop trusting Him as Able to supply what is needed, when it's needed for our children and to bring good in and from their lives. The truth is only God is Able to do all things at all times, even and especially when we can't.

Prayer isn't a last resort. Prayer is an opportunity for everlasting results.

James captured this idea with "*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*" (**James 5:16 ISV**). And many, including us, are living proof of that truth and desire those kinds of results with our children, too. (In case you were wondering, Union faculty and staff do pray with fervency and diligence for your children, during their time here and after graduation.)

If you're looking for a solid truth to pray for your child/children, may I suggest what my parents started praying for me before I was born and what my husband and I have prayed for our sons over and again? "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*" **Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT**



## Financial Hope in God

**Dan Griffin, Vice President for Enrollment Management**

*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 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 exhausted all options for financing his senior year. As we prayed together before he left for summer vacation, we had strong doubts about whether 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***

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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**Julie Bradfield, Director for Student Discipleship and Engagement**

*“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 with the International Mission Board in Germany, 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. My parents shared with our church, “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 the 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 experience 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 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, Union students literally travel the world on short-term, university-sponsored mission trips. During September each year, opportunities for joining God in what He is doing here in the U.S. and around the world are made known to students through chapel services, global focus events, and small groups. Our prayer is that God uses these opportunities 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 Trip applications 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, courage, and faith to take the next steps.

*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.*

Tip: Ask your student if he/she has considered going on a GO Trip and encourage him/her to explore this further. Let him/her you know are supportive of this and will be praying specifically about this decision.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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## Work and Rest

**Emily Key, Assistant Director for Student Engagement, Vocatio Center**

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30*

*Whatever you do, work heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. Colossians 3:23*

Your student is entering a brand-new stage of life that will bring both joy and challenges. You are also entering a new stage, learning how to love and parent a young adult from a distance. Amidst all the changes, the character of Jesus remains the same for both you and your student. He is gentle and lowly in heart. He is the giver of rest, and we are called to work unto him.

As a college student, my parents struck a beautiful balance of reminding me to both work and rest (and it's something I'm still learning!). They would respond to my crisis phone calls with empathy and help me determine a next step that would be productive. Sometimes that was plowing through the assignment, and sometimes it was taking a break and taking time to rest. The enjoyment we receive in our work and our rest are deeply intertwined. To work without rest is draining and exhausting. To rest without work is often a pathway to idleness. Our deep need for both work and rest has been around since the very beginning. The Lord set this overarching rhythm for us in the creation narrative. God created both work and rest, and both were good. For six days, he spoke creation into being and he shaped dust into life. On the seventh day, God rested. We are called to join him in this rhythm.

In college, I was presented, for what seemed like the first time, with the idea that my time was my own, and I governed it completely. This is a false narrative I think I will be battling for the rest of my life. God has set the rhythm for both work and rest, and we all need to be reminded that he is Lord over time and we are not. He governs not just our time, but all time. He is the creator of time and worthy of every hour he blesses us with. There is a freedom that comes with the autonomy

students receive in college. With that freedom there also comes an opportunity. It is an opportunity to learn how to steward the time provided and learn the rhythms of work and rest.

Sometimes work and rest look different depending on our stage of life. One of the constant threads, no matter if you're a freshman in college or sending your student off to college, is Christ. As believers, our work takes on new meaning if we consider all our work to be for the Lord, and not for man (**Colossians 3:23**). His glory, and not our own, becomes our goal in our work and also in our rest. It is through Christ that we can learn to enjoy deep rest even in our restless world. **Matthew 11** is a striking picture of Christ's humility and care for our hearts. Jesus talks about his deep intimacy and union with the Father. Christ is fully unified to the One who breathed life into the world. And then Jesus turns and opens his arms to us, saying, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (**Matthew 11:28**).

The Lord governs both our work and our rest. Take a few moments today to pray through these scripture passages, asking the Lord to help your student learn the rhythm of work and rest that he sets for us for his glory and our joy.

*Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. Psalm 116:7*

*Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. Psalm 37:5*

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Hebrews 4:9-10*

*Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Psalm 37:3*

*And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17*

*Dear Lord, thank you for inviting us to both serve You and rest in You. Please help these incoming students see the beauty of who You are and the joy of working unto You and resting in Your presence. Be with the parents of these new students as their routines and rhythms shift. Help them see the ways You have equipped them to encourage their student in this transition. Thank you for carrying our burdens and giving our souls the rest we so desperately desire for Your glory and our joy. Amen.*

## The Lord is With You Wherever You May Go...

**Amanda Chenault,**  
**Director of Campus Events,**  
**Undergraduate Admissions**

When our first-born started kindergarten, she was so excited. She could not wait to start this new chapter of her life and every part of starting school seemed exciting to her, until the first day. She came home that day in tears and said, "I think I have learned enough, and I want to stay home with you. It is very scary at school because you aren't there." She had been with me every day of her life leading up to this day. If I'm honest, it felt scary for me too! I was entrusting my child to people I did not know. I gently reminded our daughter that although I would not be with her while she's at school, God was with her wherever she would go. He would always be with us, and He would continually be there with her at school. I told her he would never leave her and when she felt scared, she could remember God is always with her.

I remember making a construction paper heart with **Joshua 1:9** written on it. *"The Lord is with you wherever you go."* Our daughter wore that little red construction paper heart, safety pinned to her shirt, every day for the first 3 weeks of school. After that she kept it in her pencil box as a reminder God was with her. Fast forward to move in day of her freshman year of college. Although she was going to Union, and I knew she was surrounded by people who would encourage her walk with the Lord and care for her emotionally, spiritually, and physically- I was scared. She was sacred. There was so much unknown, and it felt hard. I was once again sending my child off into a new chapter of independence.

It was during this time that we were both reminded of **Joshua 1:9**. God is with her! God has always been with her! God will always be with her! Parents, as your heart is adjusting to your child starting a new, and big, life chapter I want to encourage you to cling to truth. This glorious truth is that God is truly with them and always has been. My daughter has since graduated from Union and is currently living her dream as a journalist for an incredible non-profit organization. God continues to use this verse to remind us that our daughter belongs to Him, she has always belonged to Him. What an honor it is to be her mom and to get to encourage the journey God has placed before her. As I write this I am once again reminding myself that God is with her

as she just landed in Israel, a country at war, exactly 6 months from the day the war began. She is there to do His work and to use her gifting and passion to advance His kingdom. Although it feels a bit scary, like the first day of kindergarten or freshman move in day, I know God is with her and we can both walk in faith and not fear. God often calls us to hard seasons, but he doesn't leave us in them. He always sees us through them. God has a larger story that He is authoring in our children's lives, and at times there are hard chapters, but his larger story has a wonderful ending! Trusting our children to God is one of the hardest yet most rewarding things we can do as parents. When we hand them over with faith to the journey He has set out before them we get to watch God work.

A part of me wanted to look at my 5-year-old daughter on her first day of kindergarten and say, "you can stay home with me forever!" However, if I didn't learn to let go, I would have missed out on God's rich blessing for her life. I would have missed out on seeing my faith and my daughter's faith grow simultaneously. Just as promised, God was with my daughter during her years at Union and has continued to be with her. Are you struggling to trust God as you release your child to his purposes? I would encourage you to turn your struggles into prayers. Prayers to stretch both your faith and the faith of your child.

God is with our children, wherever they go. What a beautiful and faith producing promise we must cling to on days that feel a little scary. Remember, *"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**

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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Something I have been learning in this season is the ministry of presence. What I have been learning over this past year is that one's mere presence can mean so very much. It's comforting to have someone just to sit with you. To sit with you in the hard, in the confusion, in the good, in all the emotions. The ministry that your presence can be to someone is so very powerful. This is something that I struggle to do because I am someone who likes to be a "fixer." When people come to me with questions or share struggles, my immediate reaction usually is to try and fix it. Even though most times, I have absolutely no power to be able to fix it for them.

The ministry of presence was something that my parents modeled well for me throughout my time at college. Moving six hours away from home was daunting. There were not many people from my hometown or high school who were venturing out this far for college, so I was confronted with feelings of doubt and fear. However, I want to encourage you as parents and family members to practice the ministry of presence with your student(s) while in the midst of their doubt and fear.

What does this look like? Well, here's what it looked like for me when I was in college. When you're on the phone with your student and they are calling to tell you about the hard or upsetting thing that they are walking through right now, simply listen to them. Let them feel their emotions and be sad or angry, etc... When they ask for your thoughts or your help, this is your opportunity to remind them of the truth. Validate, affirm with truth, and encourage them. Every phone call with my mom ended with a sincere, loving, "I'm so proud of you." Whether she was proud of me for what I was doing or accomplishing, or whether it was an encouraging word to leave me with, I always hung up the phone knowing that she was proud of me. She validated my emotions, reminded of what was true and good, and she always encouraged me. That's such a powerful example of the ministry of presence.

Another example about the ministry of presence is found in one of my favorite verses, **Galatians 6:2**. It says that we are called to "*bear one another's burdens*." It doesn't say take away the burdens because most of the time, we really can't do that

for people. But, we are called to walk with them through it by standing by their side and carrying it with them. This is the ministry of presence. In the hard and in the unknown, we can cling to hope because we know who can take away our burdens. He is the Lifter of our head. He is always a safe place—a God of Refuge (Jehovah Machsai) for us to run to!

We have the honor of walking alongside others, bearing their burdens with them because that's what Jesus does for us. Just because we can't fix a problem, doesn't mean we aren't needed. You don't have to solve their problems. You're not going to be able to fix it for them all the time. And that is okay! That does not mean that you are failing. Your presence is likely to be more powerful than you imagine. The "ministry of being there" is so important. We see this all throughout Jesus' ministry—He was always present with people.

As I sit here writing this on a beautiful July summer morning, this is what I want to leave you with. This is what I'm praying for your students, and I invite you to pray this over them as well. Lord, you are good! Thank you for your mercies that are new for me each day. I lift up this class of 2029 to you. Trusting you with their hearts and minds. Jesus, draw them close to you. Let this time that they are about to begin at Union be fruitful and one of growth. Teach these students to abide. To pursue you above everything else. Jesus, protect them. Remind them that you are, "*the God who is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (**Psalms 46:1**). Give them confidence and joy as they enter into this new season. Let it be one that is glorifying and honoring to you! Give me peace and patience as I sit and listen and be present. Bind my tongue and help me to be slow to speak. Give me words of encouragement to speak life into the lives of these students. Help me to be present. To follow your example in sitting in the stillness with them as you speak and as you lead them. Let my ministry of presence to these students be one that encourages them and builds them up.

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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This is what I know to be true after being a college student for two years in the 21st century... Number 1: The world is extremely persistent in trying to tell college students who they should and should not be. Media has a bigger presence than ever, and conformity is one of the greatest peer pressures we face. Number 2: Having an anchor when I left home for the first time truly shaped my college life. The Lord and my family have been the two most solid, consistent strongholds for me throughout my college experience.

Now, I recognize that I am not a parent and have not experienced any of the crazy struggles of having children. I do, however, have two amazing examples of what godly parents look like and for that I am truly blessed. I also know what it feels like to be a young adult, balancing between feeling a need for independence, yet still having so much to learn from my parents. Throughout my time as a student, this is how my parents made me feel loved, supported, encouraged, and held accountable when I left the house for the first time.

Your child needs to know there is someone in their corner, cheering them on despite the mistakes they make and the chaos they may be feeling. Most freshman will experience loneliness within their first semester at college. I believe parents can help their children thrive during this stage of life by being their biggest cheerleader. **Hebrews 10:24-25** says, *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* Encouragement is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate love as an action. Does your daughter want to go through recruitment? Ask her how you can help make it possible! Is your son interested in Student Government? Encourage him to seek a position! Is your child looking to switch their major... already? Tell them that college is the time to find their passions and follow what the Lord has called them to do! Most of us have big dreams and even bigger doubts. All that most college kids really need is someone to support them. I know that without

the encouragement of my parents, I would never have had the courage to apply for the admissions team or join a sorority or lead a campus life group.

**Proverbs 15:4** says, *"The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit."*

As a parent, I understand that it is easy to feel protective of your child's life. I'm going to be real with you... the more you attempt to control your child's college experience (constantly checking their Life360, sending them 500 texts a day, and criticizing them for the mistakes they make), the more likely your child will not want to share anything with you. I know these actions often come from a place of love, but it can be overwhelming for a student who is trying their best to find out who they want to be. I can guarantee you that a text saying, "Hey Sydney, I'm so proud of you for being an intentional friend and branching out this month!" will be received much better than "Hey Sydney, I saw you were out late... again... don't you think you need to be going to bed at a more reasonable time??" I want to challenge you to speak life into your children. This means so much more to them than you may ever know.

I truly cannot express enough how critical it is to speak identity into your college student. College is notorious for causing people to "lose their way" or "not take ownership of their faith." The enemy is good at making his way of life look fun and appealing. Simultaneously, my generation has record breaking rates of depression and anxiety. The world is going to try to convince your student of who they should be. That makes it even more important for you as a parent to speak God's truth over them. Give them a quick call or text right now speaking God's identity over them! Tell them how deeply loved they are, by the Lord and by you. Tell them how capable they are of great things. Tell them how proud you are that they are your son or daughter. Tell them how excited you are to watch them grow into the person God is calling them to be. This is the intentionality that will make all the difference to your child. Be their biggest cheerleader. Never stop speaking identity into them. Submit them to the Lord every night and thank God for them every morning!

*The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.* **Proverbs 18:21**



## Seasons

**Fran Thomas, Assistant Director  
for Campus Ministry and  
Women's Discipleship**

I have found myself in a season of great change. I have been at Union since 2012, but started a new position within the university just a couple of months ago. Some days, I feel like I know exactly what's going on and I know what I'm doing. I walk with confidence and assurance of what is in front of me. Other days, I feel lost and confused; thoughts, ideas and sentences are difficult to string together. This past May, my youngest graduated from Union and has officially left the nest. We no longer have children living under our roof. We have 3 boys, and they are now living independent lives from us. Yes, we prayed for this season. Most recently, we sold our home that our children grew up in to downsize. Whew. That was a tough one. I still have a lump in my throat about that particular part of this new season, as it was not something we had planned on. We had a conversation with our friend and realtor, Bailey Bell, agreeing to "try" to sell the house. Our house sold in 24 hours! Needless to say, we had to scramble quickly to find a plan that we could manage.

Here's the thing. Some seasons you know are coming, and some you would have never expected. I bet for most of you, you knew at some point this precious child you love so much would eventually leave the house and all the life and memories made there as a family to begin a life on their own. You became increasingly aware in recent months just how fast the clock was ticking until this new season began and those feelings became very real. And here we are. You may be moving into this new season full of hope, joy, and anticipation. Others of you are simply sad, overwhelmed, and afraid. It's okay to feel all those things in one given moment. It's okay to feel those things separately on different days. It's okay to feel whatever you feel. I have realized that I am a professional "stuffer" when it comes to my emotions and how I am feeling. This season of letting go of such a big chapter in my own life has taught me that it's okay to cry. It's okay to cry when I can't explain it. It's okay to cry when I know good and well the tears will come at even a thought of what we once had. It's okay to cry for no apparent reason. It's

okay to cry when Google Maps wants to take me "home" but my home address is no longer that home address.

In this new season, I am holding onto a very familiar passage that maybe you can hold onto as well. *Joshua 1:9* says, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged for the Lord you God will be with you wherever you go."

I want to be brave like Joshua when I don't feel like being brave. Brave is hard and even right now as I type this, I'm tired and not feeling so brave. I want to trust God like Joshua especially when I can't see what He is up to. Honestly, I would rather walk by sight and not faith. I want to believe God for good things in this new season, but right now I can't see them clearly. I know with time and His tender care, I will feel differently and see things clearly in a few short months. Let's check back in with one another at Christmas, okay? I'm happy to cry with you if you need to. I'll rejoice with you too!

I'm extremely sensitive to this new season you find yourself in. I'm sensitive to the many adjustments you are all having to make. I'm sensitive to the Lord's gentle care over you with each day. I'm thankful for new morning mercies that feel more tangible and real than they have felt in a while.

I am praying for you, mom and dad. I'm praying for you, grandparents. I'm praying for you, siblings. I'm praying for you all. Lord, we want to be strong and courageous in this season and I'm so very glad you go with us wherever we go.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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Now what? Dropping off your first child at college can be overwhelming because you don't know what to expect. How will your relationship with your child change? How are they going to survive without you? How are you going to survive without them? If you have multiple children, you realize quickly that life goes on and is still super busy with your other children at home. But dropping off your last child at college can leave you feeling empty – coming home to an eerily quiet house and not knowing what to do next.

My husband and I became empty nesters a couple years ago and faced the dilemma... what do we do now? We had been so invested in our kids' lives. We taught Sunday School and Wednesday Night children/youth classes, coached sports, chaperoned church/school trips, volunteered at school, took family mission trips, attended every practice/game/concert/play, drove kids around the world and back again, hosted birthday parties and graduation parties and sleepovers, helped with homework, and who knows how many hours we spent in carpool?!? And suddenly it all came to a screeching halt. We dropped our last child off at college... hugged him, prayed over him, cried a little, and watched him walk away. Now what were we supposed to do with our time?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the people's anxiety in life – what they will eat and drink and wear. He offers a solution that is also a great starting place as a new empty nester. **Matthew 6:33** says, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* Ask God what He wants you to do with your newfound freedom. There can be temptation to check out – to say that you have served your time, and you need a break. But what would God have you do to further His kingdom? Perhaps He will call you to serve in a new ministry at church or in your community. He might call you to mentor college students or parents of teenagers. Maybe He wants you to open your home to a community group or serve in the preschool ministry to give young parents a break. Ask God with open hands how and where He wants you to serve and then be obedient and do what He is calling you to do.

This is also a great opportunity to get your relationships back on track. Start with the most important relationship. **Matthew 22:37-38** says, *"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."* In the busyness of raising a family, the time we spend with the Lord, in His word, and praying to Him can diminish if we are not intentional. If this has happened to you, now is a great time to re-prioritize time alone with Lord in your daily routine. Since I no longer have to carpool, I use that time as my quiet time with the Lord.

For those who are married, the next relationship to focus on is the one with your spouse (**Ephesians 5:21-33**). Working in admissions, I often ask parents how they feel about becoming empty nesters. "I hope we still like each other" is an answer that I often hear. The first time I heard that response, I was taken aback. But then our last child went off to college and suddenly my husband and I were faced with this real concern. It had been over twenty years since the last time it was just the two of us and a lot had changed. We determined the very first week of being on our own that we were going to bring back date nights. We went out every Friday night and reminisced over the last 25 years and talked about things we still want to accomplish. We laughed. We teared up. We prayed. We discovered that we do, in fact, still like each other.

And finally, pray for new friendships for this new season of life. Oftentimes our friendships revolve around the activities of our children. Pray that God would bring new people into your life for you to pour into and for them to pour into you. **Proverbs 17:17** tells us, *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."* God has added some older couples to our community group on Sunday evenings. These new friends have been down the road of empty nesting. They understand that parenting adult children is one of the hardest stages we face as a parent because we are no longer in control. We all pray for one another and for our children because even though they are grown, they are still our babies. We have done what **Proverbs 22:6** called us to do and trained up our child in the way he should go and now we have to trust that when he is old, he will not depart from it.

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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I have never gotten a tattoo. I probably never will. Even so, my sister and I sometimes talk to one another about the kinds of tattoos we would get if we ever got one. Of course, the big concern over a tattoo is that it is permanent (at least mostly permanent), so if you ever came to regret getting the tattoo, it would be very hard to undo your decision. Not only would it be difficult to undo a tattoo, but it would probably be something that you would have to look at every day. It would become a part of your identity, simply by being there all the time, reminding you of what you wanted it to say when you got it. You would be unable to escape it. It would never go away. I think a similar idea is expressed in *Psalm 1:2*.

*Psalm 1* lays out two paths that people can take. There is the path of blessing and the path of wickedness, and the psalmist helpfully explains to the reader what makes these two paths different. In *verse 1*, he lays out three things that the blessed person does not do: walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, and sit in the seat of scoffers. In short, the blessed person's life is not marked by sin. Of course, that is not to say that this person is sinless. Only Christ is sinless. Rather, it seems that the blessed person's life does not look like the life of the wicked person. His habits and way of life do not reflect the same values that are reflected in a life of sin.

How does this person avoid living a life of sin? I mean, the world around us makes godliness a real difficulty. We have smartphones that are outlets for envy, anger, and vainglory, and they are inlets for lust and distraction. Moreover, at work or school we are constantly tempted to gossip, to complain, to chase after popularity and favor, to be lazy in our work, and to walk by the flesh. How can anyone possibly set his thoughts on God's ways rather than man's ways? Our answer comes in *verse 2*. "*But his delight is in the law of the LORD, / and on his law he meditates day and night.*" You see, this blessed person delights in God's ways. It is as though this blessed person is a boy who sees a beautiful girl across the cafeteria one day, and he cannot stop thinking about her. God's law delights this blessed person. He loves to read it and meditate on it all the time.

This past semester, I was honored and overjoyed to be a part of the Union Scriptorium on campus. The Scriptorium is a group of students that meet chiefly to memorize Scripture. One of the things we did early in the Scriptorium was to make a list of Scripture passages that command or imply Bible memory, and *Psalm 1:2* was one of the ones we noted. We noted that in the ancient world it would have been difficult to meditate on something by reading it. Perhaps someone could get his hands on a copy of God's law and read it for a short time. However, he would need to work most days, and, in any case, it would be very difficult to read by night. We reasoned that this person would simply have to memorize what he wanted to meditate on. That way he could think about it even without a copy of the law, or while working, or even on his bed while trying to sleep.

This is how the blessed person in *Psalm 1* lives his life. He constantly thinks about the Scriptures, about God's law. They are like a tattoo that he got on his arms, down on his wrists. He sees them when he's working, doing math problems, washing the dishes, shaking hands with people, clapping at graduation, and especially when he's praying. They become part of his identity, and people ask about them. The Psalm goes on to tell us that this person is like a tree that never dies. He prospers all the time, because the truths of Scripture are always before him. What's more, God knows his ways. He will keep him, even on the day of judgment. Let us never forget the love with which God loved us, that Christ came and gave himself for us, that God raised him on the third day, and that he intercedes for us even now! Such things are too wonderful for me.

If I ever did get a tattoo—and I probably never will—but if I did, I think a good one may be the words, "Day and Night."

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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*Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:21*

**A**s parents, we have countless dreams and plans for our children. We do all we can to help them succeed in academics, sports, the arts, and everything in between. These plans are all good, but God has plans for our children that we might not even see yet.

I remember the day we dropped our oldest son off at college. It felt a little like the rug had been pulled out from under me. Up until this point, there were many things in his life that my husband and I still had control over. Much of that disappeared when we hugged him, said our goodbyes, and drove away. I remember thinking that from then on, so many things would be different. Yes, he would still come home for weekends, holidays and summers, but he would probably never truly live in our home again. I panicked! I became fearful that he would become friends with people that wouldn't be good for him. Or he would make choices that would bring pain to him and others. Or he would never make it to class because I wasn't there reminding him to go. I panicked because I no longer had control over things in his life. But I eventually came to realize that control, in a lot of ways is just an illusion.

The only One who truly has control is God. Each day I had to surrender my desire to try to orchestrate things in my children's lives so the outcome would be pleasing to me. Surrendering to God and laying my need to control at the foot of the cross every morning helped me to develop a trust in Him that changed the way I try to approach everything in my life... with open hands. I continually give the children God blessed me with back to Him and trust that His ways will always be higher than mine. This means

when things don't go the way I want them to, I can still say that God is good. Knowing that He is sovereign over all things gives me peace. It takes the pressure off me to make things all work out perfectly.

It took me a while and a lot of life circumstances to learn how to completely put my trust in Him, but it's such a peaceful place to be. I have seen God give me immeasurably more than I could ask or imagine, and I have seen him bring beauty from ashes. He truly is so good. You may be having some difficulty wholeheartedly surrendering your student to Him. I get it. I pray that you can rest in the promise that the Lord's purposes for your child will prevail. He has such abundant love for your child that He gave up His son who conquered death so that your child may live.

You can trust Him. Open your hands.

### *Personal Prayer and Reflections*

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# DAY 21

## Totally Normal: On College and Our Desire to Control

**Ted Kluck, Associate Professor of Communication Arts**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6*

Three years ago, I dropped my son off at a Union freshman dorm to begin his college career at the university where I'm a professor. I love my son dearly, and he is one of my best friends, so the moment was loaded with emotion...and despite being a part-time football coach and self-styled wannabe tough-guy... I cried. We live 12 minutes away, by car.

If you're the kind of Union parent who is genuinely interested in reading a devotional book by Union faculty, then you're probably also the kind of parent who has enjoyed a very close and influential relationship with your child. Because you're human, you probably find a lot of your identity in the respect and admiration and loyalty that you get from your child. This is totally normal, and I'm right there with you.

And let me just say "thank you" for the work that you've done, as your kids are among the most lively and engaged and academically successful kids we see here at Union.

But what's hard about this kind of relationship is that as you unpack the car and say goodbye this afternoon, you are not only saying goodbye to your child, you're also (in a sense) saying goodbye to the relatively-exclusive place of honor and influence you've held in your child's life and opening yourself up to the idea (which may be painful) that there will soon be other influencers in their lives. This (the process and the painfulness) is also totally normal.

What's tricky about this is that one of the unintended negative consequences of the super-close family unit is a student who has no interest in gently cutting the ideological parental apron strings. When you're single and 17 this is okay, but what about married and 24, when suddenly you're looking for common

ground with a spouse rather than taking directives from a parent whom you deeply admire?

And (more practically) what if your child finds himself in a classroom setting with a professor whom he either a.) really admires or b.) with whom he really disagrees? Both of these scenarios are also totally normal and will happen here at Union. And I would gently suggest that neither scenario is the End of the World for you, as a parent. Scenario "a" is healthy and a chance for your child to say, "thank you," while scenario "b" is a chance for your child to begin being the kind of adult we all say we want them to begin being.

Here are a few practical ways, as an involved parent, you can help smooth the way for your child as he or she transitions into college:

1. Encourage your child to throw himself/herself into the life of the local church! This is a really tangible way to hear from the Word each week, meet other students, and be disciplined in the family of faith.
2. Pray earnestly for your child, for yourself in this transition, and for Union. A place like Union will "go" only as we are walking closely with the Lord and growing in sanctification. Similarly, pray for God's protection as the dynamic in your family changes.
3. Do the hard emotional work of gently allowing your child to admire and make connections with other adults who have their best interests in mind. It's okay. This can be a moment of spiritual growth/trust for us as parents, as well as for our kids. It's not a zero-sum game, and it doesn't mean they admire you less. I'll be the first to admit that trusting God is an easy thing to talk about but a hard thing to do. I'm bad at it. But starting college is nothing if not an opportunity to really pray through the Proverb above – and to demonstrate trust and submission as you say goodbye to your child. It's a chance to really "do" trust and submission with them as an adult peer. This will mean the world to them.

I've noticed that some of our "best" students are also pathologically unable to say "thank you." It's weird.

## Do You Need My Ear, or Do You Want My Advice?

**Jamie Connor, Assistant Registrar and Catalogue Editor**

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." **Isaiah 30:21***

Not too long ago, I held her hand as she walked to her Kindergarten classroom, all the while giving her advice on how to be a good friend, get her wiggles out so she could listen to her teacher, and have fun. A little later, I was helping her get her shin guards on, tightening the laces on her cleats, all the while giving her advice on defending the soccer goal, passing the ball to her teammates, and playing nice. Middle school arrived and her dad and I advised her to make good grades and choices, be prepared in class, and find a good friend group. When braces, glasses, pimples, and hormones collided, the advice was plentiful, but met with equal resistance from our darling daughter who knew more than we did about anything and everything!

From teaching her how to drive, first dates, and navigating friendships that were tested, to broken hearts, a bad grade, being left out, and various other valleys, we did our best to give thoughtful, often hard but truthful advice to help her be prepared for both good and tough times. As we dropped her off at Union her freshman year, there were plenty of occasions to give advice- go to bed early (yeah, right!), keep up with your assignments, go to class, get to know your professor, and be open to new experiences, etc. As most college freshmen do, she brushed us off because a whole new world was at her feet, and it was going to be spectacular! It didn't take long for the worlds of freedom and responsibility to collide and for me to learn that before I offered any advice to her, I needed to preface it with this question: Do you need my ear, or do you want my advice?

Asking this question has saved us both from arguments and frustrating conversations because for the most part, like our daughter, these young adults just want to be heard. This question has allowed me to take a step back and listen, truly listen, to my young adult daughter. Sometimes, she genuinely

wants advice; most of the time, she just needs me to hear her as she thinks through the situation at hand and works towards a solution. Isn't that what we as parents try to teach them along the way? We have always instilled in her to search the scriptures for any situation she faces. Her father and I always tell her to trust in the Lord, lay her plans at His feet, and surrender to His will. **Isaiah 30:21** says, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left. It is important to remember that while we have been the voice they have heard giving them advice as they grow, we are also to teach them to hear the Lord's voice as He leads them in the way that He has planned for them.

Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:10**, that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." How wonderful and reassuring it is to know that your college freshman is His workmanship, created in Christ for good works. When fear arises about the future and the unknown, encourage them that the good works God has for them were prepared before they were born so that they would walk in them. How do we do this? We pray. We ask the Holy Spirit to hover in places we can't. We lift them up to our Heavenly Father to guide them, draw them closer to Himself, and at the same time, give us parents the peace to know that the advice we have given them from God's Word has helped them get to this part of their journey.

Just yesterday, my now college senior at Union, said to me, "I need your advice"; she already knew the question was coming! So, the next time your college-age child is facing a dilemma and comes to you, remember to ask them, "Do you need my ear, or do you want my advice?"

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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## When There Are No Footprints in the Sand

**Jacob Shatzer, Provost  
and Vice President for Academic Affairs;  
Professor of Theological Studies**

*The water saw you, God.  
The water saw you; it trembled.  
Even the depths shook.  
The clouds poured down water.  
The storm clouds thundered;  
your arrows flashed back and forth.  
The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
lightning lit up the world.  
The earth shook and quaked.  
Your way went through the sea  
and your path through the vast water,  
but your footprints were unseen.  
You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.  
**Psalm 77:16-20 (CSB)***

As a Union student myself, I benefited from many dinners in faculty homes. At one of those homes, I remember a unique living room coffee table. It had a glass top, with a display case of sorts underneath. Under that glass, my professor and his family had collected various items that reminded them of key junctures in their family's life when they had clearly seen God work. Even though I wasn't a part of the family and didn't have any attachment to the items, I loved hearing about it and thinking of similar moments in my own life.

I'm sure you've done the same, especially during seasons of transition. Perhaps you've done it recently as you've thought about the way God has worked in your child's life leading up to college. I hope you've found encouragement as you've remembered the clear works of God in your family's life.

This remembering is certainly a biblical pattern, and one that is commanded (the Passover itself was meant to be a meal rehashing and reminding of God's work). We see it in Stephen's

sermon in **Acts 7**. We see it in the psalms. But what we sometimes miss is that the Israelites not only remembered when they saw God work. They even celebrated the times when they knew he was at work but they couldn't see it.

It's right there—look carefully at **Psalm 77:19**. "*Your way went through the sea and your path through the vast water, but your footprints were unseen.*" Some Christians have talked about the "hiddenness of God" as one of God's attributes. In other words, even when we can't see God working, we know that he is, and we worship him for it. His hiddenness is actually one of his characteristics. Think of the old poem, "Footprints in the Sand"—you know the one, when you look back and only see one set of footprints? And that was when Jesus was carrying you? Well here the Israelites are looking back and seeing no footprints. And yet they worship.

We can do the same, confident that God works in ways we see and don't see. And in particular when we find our family spread out for the first time—or maybe the second or third—as a child goes to college. There's so much that we can't see. But we can trust that God is working, as he always has and always will.

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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## Trusting God With the Unknown

**Krista Robertson, Alumna**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, acknowledge God in all your ways and he will direct your paths. **Proverbs 3:5-6***

In August of 2019, as my family and I were loading the car, a thousand thoughts flooded my mind at once. “Will I really be able to drive home from Jackson to Memphis enough to see my family?” “Will I find a Church as good as my dad’s church?” “Will my professors be intimidating?” “What if I find out that I hate teaching?” “What if I don’t mesh well with my roommates?” I was excited to leave and start my new adventure in college, but there was so much I didn’t know. So much that I didn’t understand and couldn’t see. My parents felt the same way. Our family is closely knit, and for 18 years we had been a family of four who did everything together. And now, their first child was leaving home, and they had no idea what to expect. All of us were terrified. Minutes later, all of the bags were packed and the only thing left for us to do was walk out of the door, all of us a little hesitant. The next thing that happened is what I remember the most. Before we piled into the car, my dad called us all into the living room and asked us all to get in a circle and pray. This was not unusual to our family, we prayed before any trip big or small, but what made this prayer different was the content of the prayer. He started off the prayer thanking God and asking Him for protection for the journey ahead, but the rest of the prayer was full of surrender. My dad surrendered his fears, his doubts, his questions. He prayed that our whole family would be reminded that God was in control of our future, and whatever we didn’t understand or couldn’t see that we would be comforted by recognizing God’s sovereignty in our lives, his direction, and his Lordship.

In that moment, my fears were calmed, and I was overwhelmed with peace. My dad was doing what we all should do when faced with the unknown, trust God and lay our worries at his feet. There was no way that I could have imagined what the Lord was going to do in my four years at Union. Becoming a leader on campus, finding a church home that I adore, meeting

the man that I would marry, making friendships that would last a lifetime, becoming even closer with my parents and sister, graduate with a degree in teaching, and most importantly grow in my faith in Jesus. God worked it all out for my good and His glory.

My college journey was not all rainbows and sunshine, but God always proved Himself to be faithful, and all I had to do was acknowledge and trust him. Now trusting and acknowledging God is easier said than done. Every new season of life brings new waves of unknowns, fears, and anxieties. But overtime, I have learned that instead of spiraling and getting stuck trying to put the puzzles of my life together, to go back to my dad in the living room and remember to do those two simple things. Pray and surrender.

So as your child shares with you the different stressors and pressures of the unknown during their college season (and they will have many), or maybe as you think about all the scary or unknown scenarios of their future, take a moment together to lay it all at the Father’s feet. Trust me, it will impact them for years to come. Praying blessings and favor on you and your student’s life.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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## One Step at a Time

**Mandy Cates, Assistant Professor of Education; Director for Accreditation and Assessment**

*"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." Jeremiah 29:11*

A few summers ago, my husband and I were exploring Tallulah Gorge State Park in northern Georgia. Brian is an avid outdoorsman, so he encouraged me to join him on Hurricane Falls Loop Trail. This trail—with a total of 1,099 stairs and an approximately 2 mile round trip—is rated difficult, and that should have been a signal for me to skip this particular adventure. Alas, I did not heed the clear warning at the trailhead. The journey to the bottom of the gorge was very enjoyable. The beauty of God's creation left me in awe. However, when it came time to begin the climb to the top, I looked at the hundreds of steps and froze. I quickly gathered my wits and started moving as quickly as I could back up the stairs. My husband was taking the stairs at a much steadier pace, and he encouraged me to slow down. When I confessed my anxiety about having the stamina to make it back to the top, he told me that the old adage was true: slow and steady wins the race. He went on to share a lesson he learned on his journey to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro. The experienced guides have a phrase they repeat to remind the hikers to take care of their physical health and their overall mindset: "pole, pole" (pronounced poh-lay, poh-lay). In Swahili, this means, "slowly, slowly." Instead of allowing the eager climbers to move as fast as possible to get to the top of the mountain, the guides encouraged them to take things slowly—one step at a time. This is vital at such elevations, as hikers must acclimate to the reduced oxygen levels in the atmosphere as they ascend. While elevation was not a concern in Tallulah Gorge, I was not a very experienced hiker. However, I was very accomplished in evaluating all aspects of a situation and mentally constructing the worst-case scenario. (Anyone else?) Brian reminded me to slow down and focus on the single stair in front of me. He told me to refrain from looking at the rest of the staircase, as I would only see how far I had to climb. He and I both knew that would only discourage me and lead to a feeling

of overwhelm. Rather, he knew that "pole, pole" was the only way I was going to get where I needed to be.

When students settle into the rhythm of the semester, they can sometimes experience what I call "syllabus overwhelm." Many of them are not accustomed to seeing the details of every assignment for their courses mapped out at the opening of the semester. When the realities of course readings, research papers, class presentations, projects, and exams loom on the calendar, our students can feel as I did that day at the base of Tallulah Gorge. Let us remind them that courses are not designed to be completed in a hurry. Rather, the learning journey is enriched by taking things one step at a time. As our students enter a stage of the semester where they can feel the pressure to accomplish everything right now, let us remind them to plan well, pivot when needed, and take things one step at a time. Pole, pole. Slowly, slowly. God is with them every step of the way.

*Lord, we thank you for our students and the plans that you have for them. We are grateful that you hold every step they take in your mighty hands. We ask your continued blessing upon them as they study, work, and learn. Please help them remember that they are in your care and that they are so very loved. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **Hebrews 10:23-25***

I remember well the look on my parents' faces when I said I wanted to go to Union. It was relief mixed with anticipation and a gratitude that the Lord had led me to this decision. I knew Union was really where they had wanted me to choose all along – a place committed to Christian education and upholding Biblical values. For my family, it was a breath of fresh air compared to many other institutions I had considered. I also remember well the look on my parents' faces the night we said our goodbyes and they left me at Union for my first week. Even though they knew I was in good hands and we would be able to visit again before long, their emotion reminded me this would be a big change for the family.

As He often does, God used that big change to increase our faith in Him in powerful ways. It is ultimately His faithfulness that has helped me to adjust and succeed in college. At the same time, as I think back to that time of transition, my family continued to exert an important influence on me. Few things stand out to me more than the encouragement I received from my parents. Sure, their role in my life had changed, but they were not at all absent. I can remember plenty of phone calls home my freshman year - some just to touch base and catch up on things and some in which I really needed to talk through some things. My parents always expressed that they were available and willing to listen, and they always offered their advice and encouragement.

But I'm not just talking about a surface level encouragement merely designed to make you feel better. I mean the kind of exhortation being described above by the writer of Hebrews – the kind of healthy and strong encouragement that stirs up and spurs on a brother or sister in Christ. Admittedly, there were calls in which I got an earful of what I didn't exactly want to hear at the time – but it was exactly what I needed to hear. If I called to get something off my chest, my parents' encouragement didn't stop at

sympathizing with my circumstances. There was also the push to dig in, take responsibility, take initiative, and be who God created me to be. Often my dad would pray for the family and for me to have wisdom and strength. Occasionally my mom would ask a pointed question like "Son, have you been spending time in the Word?" to check in on my spiritual well-being. They never once hesitated to say that they loved me and were proud of me, but they still made a point to urge me forward.

And what a Christ-like example that has been. Indeed, we have a savior who is able to "*sympathize with our weaknesses*" because he was "*tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (**Hebrews 4:15**) who also commands that his disciples must deny themselves and take up their crosses daily to follow him (**Matthew 16:24**).

Now, as a junior at Union, the prayers and encouragement of my parents continue to be a huge blessing. My parents have always been available and interested as people I could talk to. But at the same time, having entrusted me to the Lord, they have given me space to grow and continued to exhort and encourage me in the faith – all of which has been exactly what I needed.

I hope that a student's perspective will be helpful for all of you who are parents of new Union students. My encouragement to you is that your encouragement and prayers for your student truly do make a difference. God is faithful to bring to completion the good work He starts in His children (**Philippians 1:6**). I pray for peace, wisdom, and blessings for you and your family as your student begins their time at Union.

### **Personal Prayer and Reflections**

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*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

## Romans 15:4

**I**n all honesty, I've never been a parent. I don't want this to turn you away. Instead, I hope to speak to your curiosity about unanswered phone calls or texts. Just a few years ago, I was the student who saw their parent drive away while looking at me in the rearview mirror. I remember my mom calling me crying with both tears of joy and grief while we talked of hopes and dreams. Some were the same, while some were very different, but hopes and dreams nonetheless. We both knew the next few years would look different as we both entered a new season in our lives. I gained new roommates and opportunities as she went home to an empty nest after known parenting for over two decades. In both of these seasons, there is excitement but also a little bit of fear of what might come.

The truth is, the Lord is far too kind to reveal 4 years any more than one day at a time. That is the beauty of it all. If we knew the future like we know the past, what would be the need for faith? The past is a gift to us. It allows us to step into other people's stories and learn from them. Day by day the Lord is refining what it looks like to make our broken hearts, in this broken world, whole. In **Romans 12-15**, Paul talks about how God's righteousness is to be expressed in the lives of believers. He is equipping us to love God and love people better than the day before. To dream with them, to sit with them, to grieve with them, to pray with them, to walk with them regardless of where our hope in today stands. *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."* **Romans 12:15**. As a parent, this is what you have done for the past several years.

“Hope be my anthem” is a part of many of my prayers. These are the words that on heavy days make my heart feel slightly lighter and remind me who the author of my story is. I have had my fair share of bad days, but when I remember this phrase and

God's promises I am reminded of the greater plan and purpose. There are many things we hope for in life. I'm sure you hope good things for your college student like growing closer to the Lord, having a great experience, getting involved, making quality friends, etc. These are all wonderful and fruitful things. There are also days in our lives that aren't picture-perfect. There are days when what brings us to the start of the next day is having hope in the Lord and all we know to be true. We can be encouraged that we're all just walking each other home. We are all on our way home.

When your heart is heavy, days are long, and words fall short, may hope be your anthem.

### ***Personal Prayer and Reflections***

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When I was a missionary kid living in Southeast Asia, I remember how many times we were invited by national partners to their houses for a meal. Usually—as is common for small children—I found this time boring and unnecessary, not understanding the significance of fellowship and breaking bread with others. Each of these meals of rice, stews, curries, and teas was an opportunity for my parents to show their hosts the love of Christ, and for our partners to get to care for us through the opening of their homes. Looking back, I love that I got to be witness to the act of welcoming people into a space where they would feel cared for and safe, an act that transcends cultural boundaries.

Upon coming to Union as a freshman, I felt that same welcome the first time I walked into Barefoots, the only campus coffee shop at the time. Little did I know at the time how fundamental the coffeehouse atmosphere was (and is) to the mission of Barefoots. Historically, coffee has played an integral part in hospitality and in welcoming people into unfamiliar places. Our goal (that I get to further now that I'm the director) at Barefoots and Modero is to continue that mission of creating spaces for people to cultivate community through conversations and the arts.

Hospitality is a deeply biblical concept. Its significance can be seen in Abraham's welcome of the three men/angels. In **Genesis 18**, he sees the men coming from far away, and he goes to them, offering them food and drink. No introductions were necessary. In a sometimes treacherous and barren landscape, it was a social obligation for people to welcome sojourners into their home for a meal. Over a meal, strangers became friends, and even for just a moment, the wanderer found a home. This act of hospitality was considered vital enough that it became a part of the Levitical law:

*"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall do him no wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself,*

*for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."* **Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV**

When God gave Moses the law, sojourners, widows, orphans—all those who were vulnerable in society and often isolated without family—merited particular focus. Even in the New Testament, we are encouraged to *love our neighbor as ourselves* in **Matthew 12**, but also reminded to show hospitality to strangers in **Hebrews 13**, *"for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."*

Perhaps as you drop your child off at Union, you're feeling uncertain about the many unanswered questions you have. If one of those questions is, 'will my child find a home here?', I can tell you from my experience as a student and as a staff member that all those at Union seek to create spaces of welcome for each and every student. Whether those spaces are the armchairs in Barefoots, a professor's office, a staff member's house, or your student's dorm room, you can trust that the Lord cares for even the most vulnerable and lonely, finding them homes with families (**Psalms 68:6**). Be reassured, knowing that the Lord, who is our home, has gone before your student and provided hospitable places for him or her. Encourage your students to seek out those places of rest, and in turn, to provide places of rest for others.

### Personal Prayer and Reflections

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## A New Season of Ministry

***Michele Atkins, Professor of Education,  
Associate Provost, and Title IX Coordinator***

God calls His children to different ministries at various times during our lives. Even when you know it is time to move to the next season of ministry, it can still be incredibly difficult to do so, especially when you have emptied your mind, heart, and soul into it.

God reminds us in **Ecclesiastes 3:1 (AMP)**, *“There is a season (a time appointed) for everything and a time for every delight and event or purpose under heaven.”* This passage confirms that all events are in the hands of God and happen at the appropriate time.

My husband and I have three adult children and are pleased that all have earned college degrees. That means that we have unloaded the car, set up that first dorm room, and said our “first” goodbye on three separate occasions. Three bachelor’s degrees and two master’s degrees later, I can assure you that the emotional toll of leaving them gets better, but I still have the urge to make life a little easier for them, to intervene and fix their problems. Perhaps you are feeling the urge to fix a few things for your student right now. Resist that urge! God gifted us with 18 years to *“train them up in the way they should go”* in a direct way. When it is time for your student to leave home for college, it is time to let go of your direct training and enter a new type of relationship. You are now beginning a season of training them up in a much more indirect way.

The most constructive way to let go of your college student is to entrust them to God. He knows how difficult it is to do so, as He chose to let go of His only son for the good of mankind (**see *John 3:16***). Will your student encounter problems to solve along the way? Absolutely! If you step in to fix all their problems, they have no opportunity to grow into the individual God intends them to be. You can take comfort that throughout the Bible, God promises to protect His children. *“But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you [setting you on a firm foundation] and will protect and guard you from the evil one.” 2 Thessalonians 3:3*

So, parents, speak words of life to your student. Pray for your student. Stay connected to your student while allowing them to navigate their life, even if you do not approve of every decision. If you have not done so already, learn to live your life separate from your student. Enjoy this new season of relationship with your adult child. God has great things in store for your new season of ministry.

### *Personal Prayer and Reflections*

[illegible]



*Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.*  
**Proverbs 4:26**

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.

## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Acknowledgment

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Thank you to everyone who contributed to this 30-day devotional for our new families. What a gift to be encouraged by such wonderful staff, faculty, students, and alumni. Their perspective and words are a gift and a treasure to us all. Thank you to the Office of Communications and Printing Services for their collaboration on this devotional.

We pray that each day of reading, prayer, and reflection encourages you in the Lord as you step into this next season. Thank you for trusting us with your student. That trust is not something we will ever take lightly.

The aim of the Office of Student Discipleship and Engagement is to meet students where they are by providing a grace-infused student experience that fosters Christ-Centered formation. If you have any questions about Union University or our office within Student Life, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,  
Joe Ball - [jball@uu.edu](mailto:jball@uu.edu)  
Julie Bradfield - [jbradfield@uu.edu](mailto:jbradfield@uu.edu)  
Trenton Holloway - [tholloway@uu.edu](mailto:tholloway@uu.edu)  
Hayden Phillips - [hphillips@uu.edu](mailto:hphillips@uu.edu)  
Kelsey Stookey - [kstookey@uu.edu](mailto:kstookey@uu.edu)  
Fran Thomas - [fthomas@uu.edu](mailto:fthomas@uu.edu)

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. **Isaiah 40:8***

