A person wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and denim shorts is sitting on a dark brown wooden slatted bench outdoors. They are holding an open book with a dark cover and white pages. The background consists of lush green foliage.

GREEK
INTERVARSITY

GREEK & CHRISTIAN

A DEVOTIONAL FROM GREEK INTERVARSITY

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INTRODUCTION

GOD & GREEK LIFE?

ONE HUNDRED YARDS OF SEPARATION

It's Thursday night- thousands of Greeks are defying 2,000 years of Roman Calendar tradition by starting their weekend two days early. The sound of music and the smell of beer mixed with other burning substances fills the halls of the fraternity. Yet, as our sorority counterparts begin to trickle in to pregame, I find myself sketchily slipping out the back door hoping no one will ask where I'm going.

I'd rather not have to awkwardly explain that I'm going to a worship gathering on campus.

As I enter the gathering with a thousand other people, I'm met with polite smiles and questionable glances as people notice the Greek letters on my shirt. I'm quick to take a seat on my own just before the lights dim and the worship begins. After the typical music/ speaker/prayer combo, I make a quick exit and walk 100 yards across campus to rejoin my fraternity brothers downtown where I'm briefed on what I missed.

THE TENSION OF BEING GREEK & CHRISTIAN

This became my Thursday night routine after I started following Jesus in college. Between my love for God and Greek Life there was 100 yards of separation. In that separation, was this awkward tension where my Greek friends didn't fully understand my faith and the people at the Christian gathering didn't fully understand my fraternity. So, depending on who I was with, I resorted to either hiding my faith or hiding my letters. Maybe you can relate.

RESOLVING THE TENSION: Faith or Friends?

After nearly 15 years of living and working in the world of Greek Life, I've noticed there are typically two ways people resolve this tension:

Keep Your Faith. Ignore Your Friends.

On one hand, you could focus on your faith by attending the Christian gatherings and conferences, joining a small group, and surrounding yourself with people who share your faith and lifestyle.

People who take this route do grow in their faith, but sometimes do so at the expense of their connection and credibility with their brothers or sisters.

They run the risk of becoming “ghost brothers or sisters” - mythical creatures that only show up on composite pictures or chapter mandated events never to be seen at any other Greek functions (and especially not at the informal get togethers that “you just had to be there” to witness).

Keep Your Friends. Ignore Your Faith.

On the other hand, you could focus on your friendships in Greek Life by attending every social event, joining leadership in your chapter, and surrounding yourself with people who share your friendships and social life.

People who take this route do enjoy great friendships with their brothers and sisters, but sometimes do so at the expense of their faith.

They run the risk of becoming “cultural Christians” - equally mythical creatures that only show up to church on holidays never to be seen living out their faith in any practical way (and especially not at the informal get togethers that “you just had to be there” to witness). But let's be honest.

Neither option is very appealing, which raises the question,

Is it really possible to be both Greek and Christian?

Is there really a way to fully invest in your faith and friendships without compromising one or the other?

ENTER GREEK INTERVARSITY...

A magical, fratty place where you can actually explore and grow in your faith alongside your friends in Greek Life. Greek InterVarsity brings the best of Christian faith and the best of Greek Life together so that you don't have to choose between your faith or your friends. You can be fully Greek and fully Christian without compromising one or the other. It's like a mixer between God and Greek Life.

BEING GREEK & CHRISTIAN

My Thursday night routine changed when I found Greek InterVarsity. For starters, I stopped taking my lonely walks across campus because I found that there were other Greeks downtown that were trying to live out their faith and follow Jesus just as much as I was.

Some of my most exciting conversations about Jesus occurred late night in crowded bars after football games. Some of my greatest faith awakening moments happened during a Bible Study led by one of my fraternity brothers. And, to this day, one of the most faith stretching experiences was taking over that Bible Study after that brother graduated.

So the next time you find yourself wondering, "Is it really possible to be both Greek and Christian?" Ask yourself...

Will Panhellenic recruitment be one of the most emotional experiences of your life?

Will pledge season be one of the best times you never want to have again?

Do they sell hot dog buns in packs of 10 but only hot dogs in packs of 8 in a massive profit scheme to sell more hot dogs?

The answer is an obvious,

"Yes!"

ABOUT THIS DEVOTIONAL

WRITTEN BY GREEKS. FOR GREEKS.

We believe that it's possible to be Greek and Christian. These twenty devotionals, written by Greeks and for Greeks, are meant to encourage you as you wrestle with how to follow Jesus in your fraternity or sorority.

You can read them in order or hop around or skip around based on topic or the Scripture passage.

So find a quiet spot and spend some time reflecting on God's Word.

ABOUT GREEK INTERVARSITY

WHERE GREEK & CHRISTIAN COME TOGETHER, EST. 1991

Greek InterVarsity is a national Christian ministry that helps fraternity and sorority students integrate their faith with Greek life. We believe that Jesus is just as present in a fraternity basement or a sorority living room as in a church building.

We are a ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a national college ministry that longs to see every corner of every campus in the United States come to know and follow Jesus Christ.

To learn more, visit greekiv.org



JESUS ON GREEK ROW

GETTING STARTED

There are four Gospel (meaning “Good News”) accounts about Jesus’ life and teaching. This devotional focuses on the first chapter in the Gospel of John. John chapter 1 is different than the other accounts. Rather than beginning with Jesus’ birth (the famous “Christmas” story), it begins with poetry, calling Jesus the “Word” and describing his relationship with God and with us.

JOHN 1:1-5 & 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do you think the author chose to call Jesus, the “Word”?
2. According to John, what is Jesus’ relationship with God?
3. What do you think it means when it says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” or in the Message version, “the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood?” What does this tell us about Jesus?
4. What would it look like if God moved into your “neighborhood”? Into your dorm? Onto Greek row? Into your fraternity house?

CLOSING REFLECTION

All around us there are amazing and beautiful things: sunsets & sunrises, healthy relationships and true brotherhood & sisterhood. But amid the good, something is wrong. Conflict goes unresolved. People hurt one another and themselves. Politics seem to result in more division than unity. And the world constantly grieves over death and suffering.

We as Christians believe that God created the whole world for holistic good. Not a cheesy kind of good, where everyone has fake white smiles, perfectly molded bodies and the sun shines every day. But a deep and real good, what Jewish people refer to as "shalom" (peace). Everything and everyone is right with one another. Shalom is a world filled with deep love, forgiveness, sacrifice, generosity, and grace.

But something is wrong. For some reason, whether it's fear, pride, or stubbornness, we reject God's leadership- his idea of goodness. We cling to control, to the idea that we can be "gods" in our own life, hurting others and ourselves in our effort to control everything. God, in his eternal love and grace for us, didn't walk away and leave us in this mess. And he didn't require us to clean ourselves up and come to him. Rather, he came to us. God, in the form of Jesus, put on flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhoods, to show us what it looks like to truly love, to truly forgive, and to experience a full and whole life, both now and for eternity.

Where are you at with this idea? What questions do you have? What blocks you from inviting Jesus to move into your neighborhood?

”

***THE WORD
BECAME
FLESH AND
MADE HIS
DWELLING
AMONG US.***

“

JOHN 1:14

GOD HAS EVERYTHING FOR YOU

GETTING STARTED

When I was in school, I wanted to have a good time, be one of the guys, and get the attention of the pretty girls. Pretty standard for a fraternity guy I guess. My unstated assumption was that if I could get these things, then I would be happy. My pursuit of happiness generally consisted of working out (to impress the girls) and going out (to have a good time) all while maintaining a high GPA and BAC (like one of the guys).

However, when I started following Jesus, my lifestyle changed. Instead of getting drunk and hooking up, I started reading my Bible, praying, and attending church. What's interesting is that while my lifestyle changed, my goals didn't. My ultimate goals still revolved around my personal comfort and happiness. I just went about them in a more religious way. That's when I realized that God and I had very different goals for my life...

ROMANS 8:28-32

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. 31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is God's ultimate goal (or destiny) for life? What does God use to accomplish this goal?
2. Why do you think this is God's goal and plan for life?
3. How do your desires and goals align with God's? How are they similar? Different?
4. How might working to align your goals with God's lead to greater happiness?

CLOSING REFLECTION

What is God's ultimate goal for your life?

To make you more like Jesus. That is, to use your time, spend your money, treat your friends, and live your life as Jesus would if he were you. God uses "all things" to accomplish this, including both the good and the bad. The good times and the bad break ups are all means God uses to help you become more like Jesus. He does this all for your "good" because he wants what's best for you.

In the end, God wants to give us a greater happiness than we could ever achieve on our own, but it's only found in pursuing him.

As I continued to follow Jesus, I realized that God's ultimate goal for my life wasn't to just replace my current lifestyle with a more religious one. It was to replace my ultimate desire for personal happiness with a desire for him. The crazy part was that the more I aligned my desires and goals with God's the more happy and content I became. When I pursued happiness on my own, I found neither happiness nor God, but by pursuing him, I found both.

God doesn't want you to just be happy. He wants you to be just like him.

Take a moment to reflect on this question:

If Jesus were living your life- working at your job, hanging out with your brothers/sisters, going to your classes- how would he live your life? What would be the same and what would be different?

”

**GOD
DOESN'T
WANT YOU
TO JUST BE
HAPPY. HE
WANTS YOU
TO BE JUST
LIKE HIM.**

“



ARE YOU "WASTING" YOUR LIFE?

GETTING STARTED

We live in a culture that values "stuff". And let's be honest, Greek life LOVES stuff. We're constantly on the prowl for what's new and relevant, staying ahead of the curve as much as possible. Stuff seems to give us meaning and value. In today's passage, Jesus is with his disciples at his friend Simon's house. He's within just two days of his death when he meets a woman who does something surprising with her "stuff".

MATTHEW 26:6-13

"While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why is the woman pouring out this expensive perfume? What's the deal with that?
2. Why does her actions make the disciples, "indignant"? Is what she is doing actually wasteful?
3. Why does Jesus say her actions are "beautiful"? What do you think is motivating the woman? Motivating the disciples?

CLOSING REFLECTION

In today's passage, this woman does something surprising. She takes her "stuff", her expensive perfume, and "wastes" it all over Jesus. This would be like taking the most expensive bottle of champagne and pouring it on the ground. The disciples look down their noses at her, isn't this wasteful?? But no, Jesus says it is beautiful. This woman gives her most precious thing in order to honor Jesus. In the eyes of the world, this is wasteful. But to Jesus this is beautiful.

But "stuff" is more than just physical items. It's also our time, talents, and ambitions. Our culture today might tell us that if we sacrifice these things to the growth of our faith, that is also a waste. For example, when I got hired by Greek InterVarsity, people around me were concerned. Why turn down high paying jobs elsewhere in order to work for a non-profit that pays a pittance? Why say no to the networking opportunities and status of a high profile/high profit company to work for a ministry? They were worried that I was throwing my time and talents down the drain. Essentially they were saying the same thing as the disciples: "What a waste!"

But the truth is that when we give what is most precious and valuable to Jesus, he sees this as admirable! When we are willing to give him our time, our reputation, our ambitions, our dreams, and sure, even our physical "stuff", the world might call it a waste but Jesus calls it "beautiful."

Whenever we give to God what is most precious and valuable to us, it is never a waste. It is a beautiful thing.

As you think about your semester, consider these areas:

- Time- How is Jesus inviting you to "waste" time with him? How can you practice giving Jesus the expensive gift of time, trusting that it will be a "beautiful thing"?
- Motivations- What drives you to do what you do? Why are you at your internship/job/or taking the classes you're taking? Is it out of love for Jesus or something else?
- Stuff- What things are most precious to you? How would you feel if you were to "waste" them on Jesus? How would others respond?

”

**WHENEVER WE
GIVE TO GOD
WHAT IS MOST
PRECIOUS AND
VALUABLE TO
US, IT IS NEVER
A WASTE.**

**IT IS A
BEAUTIFUL
THING.**

“

DOWNWARD MOBILITY

GETTING STARTED

In this week's devotional, the apostle Paul is in prison, writing to the church in Philippi. Throughout the letter, Paul encourages the Christian community in Philippi to stay united in the midst of persecution. In this passage, he reminds them of Jesus' leadership and what it means to be members of God's family. As you read this passage, look for anything that seems unexpected or unlikely.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In vv. 1-4, what do you think it means to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind”? How have you experienced this type of community?
2. In this passage, what do we learn about Jesus’ mindset in vv. 5-11? What strikes you most about Jesus’ mindset?
3. In v. 5, it says that in our relationships with others, we should have the same mindset as Jesus. How have you experienced this in your relationships? How do you feel challenged by this passage to have Jesus’ mindset in your relationships (greek brothers/sisters, family, dating)?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Every time I read this passage, the line that sticks out to me is:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God to be used to his own advantage.”

As God-in-flesh, Jesus has every right to wield power and to throw around his authority. But he doesn’t. Instead he lays down his power, he lays down his privilege, and serves deeply. Sadly, many in leadership seem to care more about gaining or holding on to power than serving the people around them.

If I turn the magnifying glass on myself, I’m not immune to the desire for power either. I love to be in control. I clench power in my fists, reluctant to let go. I foolishly believe that if I am in control, nothing can go wrong. No one can hurt me, no one can take advantage of me. I’m safe. When things don’t work out how I plan, I’m tempted to resent the people I’m called to serve. What have they done lately for me? What if I serve them but they don’t serve me back? What am I really getting out of this relationship anyway?

If left unchecked, my complaints turn into bitterness- which inevitably leaks out and spills all over those I’m entrusted to lead. My service is no longer a gift, it is a curse with strings attached. In my grasping for power and in my greedy longing for privilege, I elevate myself while pushing others down. In my clumsy attempts at self-preservation, I hurt those around me and damage my relationships.

The Way Up is Down

Jesus' way is different. It is the way of downward mobility. All throughout Scripture, we see glimpses of his upside down Kingdom, where the first are last, the poor are rich, and those on the fringes are all of a sudden the insiders. Jesus is so secure in his identity as God that he is able to freely give up his power and privilege for the sake of others. Jesus models that the way to greatness is down- releasing control, letting go of power, giving rather than receiving, serving and loving without condition.

How is Jesus inviting you to pursue downward mobility?

Examine your life lately using these questions:

- Is there a place where letting go of control or power terrifies you? Name those areas.
- What prevents you from letting go of control? If you were to let go of control, what would be the worst case scenario? Talk to God about it.
- What might it look like to release these areas to God? Is there someone you can talk with about this to help you brainstorm or keep you accountable?

”

**DO NOTHING
OUT OF SELFISH
AMBITION OR
VAIN CONCEIT.
RATHER, IN
HUMILITY VALUE
OTHERS ABOVE
YOURSELVES.**

“

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

MOTIVE MATTERS

GETTING STARTED

In this excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus challenge some different narratives with examples of people doing good works. So take a deep breath, and let's jump in!

MATTHEW 6:1-8, 16-18

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why would Jesus tell these people to do these things in a solitary way, rather than in front of others?
2. Why is Jesus being so direct on this matter? What is he communicating about their actions?
3. What would people gain from practicing these spiritual disciplines in public for all to see?
4. What are your motives for doing "good works" in your life?

CLOSING REFLECTION

In this passage, the people Jesus is referencing probably received praises for their “good works,” allowing them to seem more spiritual to those around them. Here Jesus peels back the façade and shows us that their motivations do not match their actions.

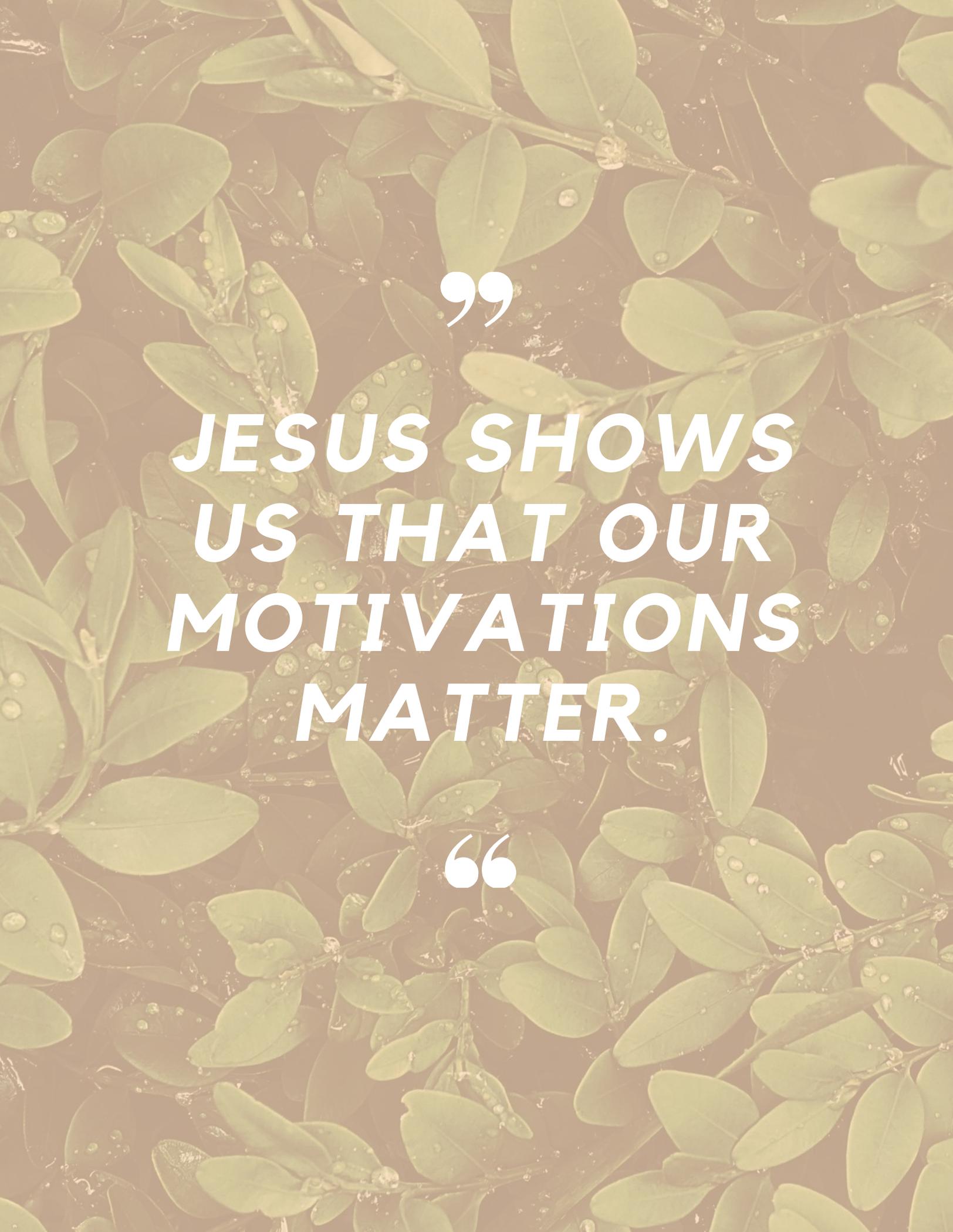
In some of our churches, maybe you feel defined by how “righteous” you appear. Or in Greek life, maybe there is an image that your chapter needs to uphold. Our culture says that we are defined by how we appear to others. For example, I often feel self-conscious about my role in leading people spiritually as a minister with Greek IV. Eyes are everywhere! When I’m at church or on campus, I feel the need to be a perfect Christian, especially when it comes to serving others well. So when I’m upset or angry, I can quickly put on a façade that all is fine, and that everything is as it should be. I never want to diminish my role as a leader in the eyes of others, thus compromising my skills as a minister. It’s easy to simply do the tasks of ministry and look good doing it...all while leaving my heart at home.

In this sermon, Jesus is not condemning these practices themselves but rather the way they are preformed. He’s getting to the heart of the matter: their intentions and their motive behind doing good works.

Jesus is showing us this: Our motives matter. Are we doing things from the heart or from the desire to impress others with our righteousness or success?

This passage challenges me to peel back the layers of the public eye and lean into my own heart. Am I truly letting God define my value and importance? Or am I letting others do it for me? If I’m honest, my motives can often come from a place of selfishness; I want to look good in the eyes of those around me. But God calls us into something deeper than the temporary praise and rewards from the world.

If we align our motives with God’s, we’ll find that his reward is much greater than anything we could’ve thought of for ourselves.



”

***JESUS SHOWS
US THAT OUR
MOTIVATIONS
MATTER.***

“

EVEN WHEN IT HURTS

GETTING STARTED

I avoid pain. For years I denied this simple fact about myself and how I would react when I saw, or heard of something on the news or in my sorority that made me uncomfortable- something that had the potential to shake me to my core. Racist incidents in the Greek System, my own sisters battling with cancer, and mass shootings flooding the news from all over our country and world were only a few examples of the reality that streamed from the news and my own chapter.

Surrounded by my sisters, it was easy to ignore the pain. After 3 years, I had become an expert avoider. Avoiding looked like scrolling through social media and escaping discomfort through a “fun time” with my chapter. When tragedy or heartache came my way, I felt alone, helpless even, without words or emotions to make sense of my experience. So I did what I knew best, I looked the other way.

As I began to follow Jesus and got to know him in greater depth, his invitation for me was to sit with the uncomfortable and to bring pain and hurt and injustice to him. I had to wrestle with the emotions and fears that I had bottled-up for years. When I searched my heart, I discovered the true core of my avoidance: I was scared that Jesus didn't care about the pain and heartache in my life, in my chapter and in the world.

In this passage from the book of John (an eyewitness account to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus), Jesus speaks to his followers about the Holy Spirit, an advocate who provides peace that nothing else can offer or compare with.

JOHN 14:25-27

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in v. 26?
2. What kind of peace is Jesus offering? How is the peace Jesus offers us different from what the world offers?
3. How do you react when you read about or experience something that causes your heart to ache?
4. What are you most afraid of? What effect does fear have on you?
5. Where do you desire peace in your own life, your chapter or in the world?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Some days it seems as though the current reality in the world, our own lives, and the lives of our brothers and sisters is overflowing with heartache and pain. We can't seem to escape tragedy and the fear it reveals in our hearts. It is easy to avoid, to look the other way. But Jesus has true healing and freedom for us, to know him more deeply. If we look at the places of fear and pain in our hearts, he is faithful to give us the peace we long for.

There is good news in the midst of pain, hurt, and disaster. As Christians we are given the Holy Spirit, which is God living in us. Because of the Holy Spirit, we are never alone and we are always equipped, especially in times like today when evil appears to have a grip on our world. God is here and he is living among each of his followers, granting us strength and giving us resources to bring hope and healing to our world.

The Holy Spirit works in our lives to provide us with deep and lasting peace. This peace is assurance in any circumstance. When we experience the peace Jesus offers, we have no need to fear the present or the future. If you are holding onto fear today, consider how your life might look different if you asked and trusted the Holy Spirit to fill you with peace.

As we present our fears, our pain and our heartache to Jesus, may we rest in full assurance that he hears us, he sees us and he waits for us to enter into his presence seeking peace, hope, and healing without fear. How might God be inviting you to surrender past pain or current heartache to him? What freedom might you experience by surrendering your burdens or the hurt you are carrying?

”

**PEACE I
LEAVE WITH
YOU; MY
PEACE I GIVE
TO YOU.**

“

JOHN 14:27

STARTING OVER AGAIN

GETTING STARTED

I'm kind of a terrible runner. I was that kid who dreaded running the mile in gym class. I only played community soccer because they had to let every kid play at least half the game. Running has never, and still doesn't, come naturally to me.

I often feel the same way about faith. I'm not someone who naturally spends hours in prayer; after 30 seconds of silence I start wondering what to make for lunch and when to walk my dog. I often watch one more episode on Netflix rather than reading the Bible. Sometimes I wonder, if I really love Jesus, shouldn't this all come more easily to me?

1 CORINTHIANS 9:23-27

23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the author (Paul) encourage us to approach our spiritual lives?
2. What is the purpose of this training? How do we "train" for the sake of the gospel?
3. What makes it hard to stay disciplined? What makes us "run aimlessly"?
4. What's one thing you can do this week to get more serious about your spiritual training?

CLOSING REFLECTION

I'm encouraged that Paul doesn't say that we should naturally be good at following Jesus. Several years after college, my roommate encouraged me to start running with her. We ran so slowly, I think I probably could have walked faster. But with a schedule, a slow start, and someone to cheer me on, I discovered I actually like running. I'm still no great runner - I'm slow, and sometimes I stop running for months at a time. Yet, every summer (despite the Memphis heat), I sign up for a local 5k training program. I know that I need a training plan and people to come alongside me if I'm ever going to improve or, honestly, if I'm going to keep running at all.

Shouldn't we be just as serious about our faith? Yes! Paul says we need to take our spiritual training even more seriously than Olympians take their training. But sometimes that means starting slow, or starting over again. Just because I haven't prayed like I intended to this summer, doesn't mean I can't start again now. Just because I'm confused by the Bible passage I read yesterday, doesn't mean God isn't shaping me as I spend time in his word.

I need a plan and friends to encourage me in my spiritual training, just like in running. So I put reading the Bible on my calendar and I pray on phone calls with coworkers. Last week, two friends and I agreed to grab coffee once a month to check in on each other's spiritual lives. It's hard work, but I'm so glad that God is patient with me as I learn to love running towards him.

”

***RUN IN SUCH
A WAY AS
TO GET THE
PRIZE***

“

I CORINTHIANS 9:24

LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

GETTING STARTED

I love going on night time drives with my best friends. There's something strangely peaceful about an open road, littered with the lights of an occasional street lamp or passing vehicle. Our conversations often ebb and flow between belly laughs and comfortable silence.

There are those people in life that we find that magic with; the ease of endless conversation mixed with moments of quiet that no one finds the need to fill with words. For me, there's a sense of comfort that comes with knowing that I am in the presence of a friend who is ready to pick up right where we left off, even after a few minutes of silence.

Paul gives one last piece of advice to close out his letter to the Colossians. Spoiler alert, he centers that advice around prayer. Now I don't know about you, but when I think of prayer, the first things I usually picture are either saying a quick prayer before eating, when I'm in trouble, or right before bed. But after all that Paul has covered so far in this letter- from reconciliation, to transformed lives, to putting to death old selves and practices- could there be something deeper about prayer that he wants to invite us into?

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does it mean to keep alert in prayer with thanksgiving (v. 2)? What does it mean to be devoted to prayer?
2. Why does Paul ask the Colossians to conduct themselves wisely specifically towards outsiders? Who does he consider the outsiders?
3. What does it mean to have our speech be “seasoned with salt” (v. 6)? Would you describe your speech this way?

CLOSING REFLECTION

In Paul's last words to the Colossians, he exhorts them to devote themselves in prayer. And Paul encourages us to do the same- to be in constant communication with Jesus, to let Him guide us in all that we do, even in how we talk to one another.

But let's be real, how many of us pray as if we're checking in with God and updating him on some circumstance in our life? Are you telling me that Paul wants me to be talking to Jesus 24/7? I think Paul is inviting us into something completely different than either of those. Perhaps we should treat our prayer lives more like a long drive, sitting with Jesus in our belly laughs, our joys, our sorrows, our frustration, and our silence. One where we know that Jesus is present with us at all times, in all places, and that we simply need to turn ourselves towards him and pick up where we left off.

Let your prayer life be one that is in one moment filled with a stream of honest thoughts and feelings, and in the next moment one that is quiet and ready to hear from the voice of God. Let your prayer life be infused into the daily rhythms of your life, and allow Jesus to transform you.

”

**DEVOTE
YOURSELVES TO
PRAYER,
KEEPING ALERT
IN IT WITH
THANKSGIVING.**

“

COLOSSIANS 4:26

PRAYER, PT. 1: THE SIMPLE TRUTH

GETTING STARTED

When you think about prayer, what comes to mind? For me, my first thought is "Shoot, I should be doing that more." Or, "Oh man, I told Joe that I would pray for him and I forgot." The thought of prayer, and even the act of doing it, can sometimes bring up feelings of guilt or shame. But God intended prayer to be a gift to us; our primary means of communicating with him.

When Jesus was teaching the disciples how to pray he didn't say, "Use lots of big words, make sure you have your life together! And you better pray every morning or you're gonna be in the dog house!" Instead, he gave us the Lord's prayer as an example. For me, I have found that reflecting on the Lord's prayer is a great way to connect with God.

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Follow the prompts below as you spend time with God today:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,"

Lord, remind me of the ways in which you have shown me your character and your holiness.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done,"

Lord, remind me of the ways that your Kingdom has come in my life, through Greek IV, at school or with my friends and family.

"On earth as it is in heaven."

Lord, remind me of the times where I was able to rest in your presence and feel as though I was experiencing a little piece of heaven.

"Give us today our daily bread."

Lord, reveal to me what I need to receive from you in this place. Would you provide _____ so that I may better praise, serve, & glorify you?

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Lord, would you reveal any areas of my life that are standing in the way of my relationship with you or that are standing in the way of my relationship with my brothers and sisters in Christ? (Surrender them to God.)

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Lord, would you open my eyes to the things in my life that are taking my attention off of you and are preventing me from being able to praise you freely.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Isn't it amazing what God can reveal through just five lines of Scripture? When I pray and reflect on the Lord's prayer, I am often shocked at how much God has been doing in my life that I have missed! Whether it is because I am moving too fast or simply don't have my eyes open to see God's work, I always find this reflection to be fruitful.

What would it look like for you to incorporate this prayer into your daily life? Maybe you need to wake up 10 minutes earlier, pray before you go to bed or on your lunch break at work? Wherever you can find space, I would challenge you to find it. Worried about making it through the whole Lord's prayer? Feel the freedom to focus and meditate on one line per day. God cares more about our hearts than about what we can accomplish.

As we continue to connect with God through prayer & scripture, he continues to transform our hearts & minds to look more like his. That is my prayer for you & for myself as we grow into the men & women that God created us to be!

”

***YOUR
KINGDOM
COME,
YOUR WILL
BE DONE...***

“

MATTHEW 6:10

PRAYER, PT. 2: ARE YOU LISTENING?

GETTING STARTED

In the many aspects of our lives- with our chapters, at a summer internship, or on a family vacation- we desire to live out our faith. But in the summer, it can feel like we have no direction with no idea of what God wants. When we make time to talk to God about this, it can feel like we are praying to an empty room. Maybe we hear crickets or the sound of our neighbors partying but we can't hear God.

If we're honest, maybe we don't even know what it means to "hear God". I think about my own life and how in my prayers I'm pleading with God. It sounds something like this: "God, what is your will for my life? Just tell me what you want me to do and I will do it!" And then I seemingly hear nothing in response. But the truth is, maybe God is speaking and I'm just not listening. When I'm honest with myself, I realize that I talk and talk but rarely leave room to just listen to God.

What I've come to learn is that when we slow down & listen, God actually does speak. But slowing down and making space for God is a discipline. I want to challenge you to create that space this semester.

Wonder what I mean by this? Let's briefly look at Samuel, a guy in the bible who learned how to hear God's voice. Samuel grew up under the care of a priest named Eli who taught him about God and a life of faith. We enter this passage as Samuel is learning how to hear from God.

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

6 Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8 A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 11 And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How many times does God call Samuel before Samuel hears him? Why does it take him so many times?
2. Who does Samuel go to when he's initially called by God? Why do you think he does this?
3. Are you making space to hear from God in your life? What things may be standing in the way of you being able to find some silence & solitude this semester?
4. What are other voices in your life that may sound familiar that are taking the place of God? This may be your parents, your own wishes/desires, etc. Spend some time asking God to reveal these familiar voices.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Reading this passage, the first thing I notice is how God calls Samuel three times before he recognizes his voice! Samuel first turns to something familiar, his teacher Eli, before even considering that it could be God. My second observation is about Samuel's posture. Although he may not recognize God's voice at first, he's still open and ready to hear. When Samuel finally realizes that God is speaking, he humbles himself in order to listen.

When I came to college, I was dead set on being a biology major and going to medical school. However, halfway through school I realized that not only did I hate science but I was also terrible at it! When I look back, it is so clear that God was trying to reveal to me that being a doctor wasn't my calling. But at the time I was so consumed by my idea of the future that I couldn't hear God at all.

The summer before my Junior year, I intentionally spent time reflecting and considering new majors. I remember being at the beach and just sitting in silence. I asked God, "Do you really not want me to be a doctor?" In the silence, a sense of unexplainable peace washed over me. I may not have heard an audible "voice," but I knew in that moment that God was freeing me from my original pursuits. I came back to school and changed my major and career path with complete confidence knowing that I was trusting God.

Hearing from God isn't always that clear and it takes time and patience to learn how to listen. Shoot, it took me two years to see what God wanted in that situation! But, if we are willing to take a risk, God is faithful to respond. Will you give it a shot? Like Samuel, will you readily approach God with openness, no matter how quickly or slowly he responds?

Find 10-15 minutes in the next couple of days to ask God if there is anything he wants to say to you. You can simply say to the Lord as Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Wait & see if God brings a scripture to mind, a friend to talk to, or an action he may want you to take. Then, praise him for whatever he says! And if you don't hear anything, remember that it takes time, just as it did for Samuel.

”

**SPEAK,
LORD, FOR
YOUR
SERVANT IS
LISTENING**

“

1 SAMUEL 3:9

THERE'S ALWAYS THAT 'ONE' THING

GETTING STARTED

It takes many forms. It's goes by many names. It's that "one thing."

Well, really, knowing how many clubs, classes and jobs you are a part of on campus it's probably closer to 25 things at the moment. Each demanding your full time and attention. Each popping up to the top of the list. And that's not even including the new notifications that popped up on social media while you were reading this. And despite our best intentions and hopes to read our Bibles more or find time to pray, somehow the day begins, the list grows, and we've convinced ourselves that our many "one things" are more urgent than the "One Thing" that is truly needed.

Even tasks and activities related to our faith can become "one things" that take priority over the "One Thing" that Jesus calls us to. Unless we are actively doing something with a very tangible outcome, it can feel like a waste of time. Does Jesus not see our many important responsibilities and obligations that make slowing down near impossible? Two sisters and their encounter with Jesus provide us with the answer.

LUKE 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are the ways you have found yourself putting working for God above being with God?
2. How can we find ourselves "preparing" for Jesus rather than simply resting at his feet? Do we feel like we can come to Him as we are, or are there preparations/improvements/changes that we feel we have to make before we can be with Him?
3. Martha doesn't sugarcoat her frustrations and has the audacity to ask Jesus if he even cares about her workload. Do you feel like you can be this honest with Jesus? Do you feel you can take your worry and frustrations to Him?
4. Jesus tells Martha that indeed only one thing matters. How does your list of priorities look in light of this word from Jesus?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Jesus is aware of your workload. He's aware of your stress. He's aware of the many things that are urgently demanding your attention. There will always be "another thing" that seems to be more important than spending time with God. There will even be things that we want to do "for" God that can take precedence over being "with" God. What are the "one things" that can wait to make space for the "one thing" that Jesus wants to offer?

”

***JESUS IS
AWARE OF
YOUR
WORKLOAD.
HE'S AWARE
OF YOUR
STRESS***

“

CONFESSIONS OF A VETERAN WORRIER

GETTING STARTED

It is so easy to get caught up in the stresses in life that we tend to forget how important it is for us to focus on the cross daily. As you read this familiar passage written by Paul the Apostle, see if anything that he says speaks to you in a new way.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. 6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. 8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does it mean to "be full of joy in the Lord?"
2. How does Paul instruct us to combat our human tendency to worry about things?
3. In what areas of your life do you struggle in focusing on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable?
4. Paul really focuses on having control of your thoughts in this passage. In what areas of your mind or thoughts do you need to practice control over?
5. How can you develop a habit of focusing on Christ in the midst of worry and stress?

CLOSING REFLECTION

I am writing to you as a veteran "worrier," so this passage always convicts me, yet holds a special place in my heart. Throughout college and even now I have to deal with intense bouts of anxiety. It is definitely not fun, but the Lord has shown me parts of himself I would have never known had I not had to go through these experiences with anxiety! Over the last couple years I have learned how vital it is for me to not let my mind completely take control when I am stressed out or worried about something.

I have learned that the most important combative tool I have in my pocket, however, is not my own control over my mind, but the fact that Jesus will fight the anxiety battle for me. I just have to pray as Paul instructs in verse 6 and Jesus does the rest! I'm not saying that self-control isn't important in the battlefield of the mind. Self-control is definitely a discipline that we need to embrace, especially when it has to do with our thoughts and the things we dwell on. Most importantly though, Christ saved us from any earthy or eternal worry with what he did on the cross. Praise God!

As you get further into the school year, I encourage you to set aside some time to really talk to God about what areas he wants to redefine in the way you think. What does he want you to have joy in or think about in a positive light? Pray that he reminds you multiple times daily of what Jesus did and what we really need to focus on!

”

***DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT
ANYTHING;
INSTEAD,
PRAY ABOUT
EVERYTHING***

“

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

WHAT IS TRUE REST?

GETTING STARTED

Do all the things! That's how we often approach life - balancing classes, internships, being on a million exec. teams, hanging out with friends, and finding time to do laundry. And while we expect the summer to be more relaxing, it often just fills up with a to-do list of its own. It's exhausting.

Many of us have a deeper weariness as well. Relationships with family or friends are strained. We find out that our future isn't going to look the way we dreamed. We turn on the news, and the world around us seems to be more messed up every day. Jesus has an invitation in the weariness.

MATTHEW 11:28-30

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is a yoke? What does it mean to have an easy yoke?
2. What are we called to do? What does Jesus promise he will do?
3. What do we learn about Jesus' character?
4. What areas of your life are currently making you feel weary and burdened? What might it look like to learn from Jesus in those areas?

CLOSING REFLECTION

The church I went to as a kid had “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” painted above the altar - but not the rest of the verse. Without the second half of the passage, it can feel like we’re doing something wrong if we pray and our troubles still remain.

Instead, Jesus says to learn from him and take up his way of living. There’s still action to be taken.

Maybe we need to learn from scripture how Jesus would respond to the broken relationships and injustices around us.

Maybe we need to let the community of Christians support us in our pain.

Maybe we need to learn how to view ourselves through Jesus’ eyes rather than wrapping our self-worth up in the things we accomplish.

But in the end, the burden isn’t our own - it’s Jesus’.

Jesus may not promise us a cold drink on a tropical beach, but what he offers us is actually better - rest not just for our bodies, but for our very souls.

”

**COME TO ME,
ALL YOU
WHO ARE
WEARY &
BURDENED &
I WILL GIVE
YOU REST.**

“

MATTHEW 11:28

TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT

GETTING STARTED

Credit to my parents; they raised me to be fairly independent. And I think they succeeded. By age 21, I had driven across the country by myself a couple times, lived abroad for a semester where few people spoke English, could do my own taxes, and add the proper amount of hot water to Ramen noodles.

Unfortunately, this same independence has made my relationship with Jesus difficult at times. I'm slow to even identify that I have needs, let alone bring those needs to Jesus with the hope that he might meet them. I think to myself, "I can handle this. No big deal". Or I just assume that Jesus already knows what I need – so what's the point in telling him? Plus – there are lots of other people with bigger needs than mine – so shouldn't I spend my time praying for them instead?

And that's where this blind beggar has a leg up on me.

MARK 10:46-52

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What do you think life was like on an average day for Bartimaeus? Why do you think Bartimaeus was so bold in this moment?
2. Why do you think people in the crowd try to silence Bartimaeus? Without passing judgment on them – what might their motivations have been?
3. Why do you think Jesus asks him a seemingly obvious question; ‘What do you want me to do for you?’
4. How did Bartimaeus demonstrate his faith in this passage? What changes for him after this encounter with Jesus?
5. Who do you most relate to in this passage? Someone in the crowd? Bartimaeus? One of the people that try to keep Bartimaeus quiet? What’s Jesus’ invitation to you through this person?

CLOSING REFLECTION

I’m challenged by Bart’s willingness to inconvenience Jesus, and that he doesn’t care if he makes a lot of noise in the process. He knows he can’t do a thing to change his own condition, and his desperation pushes him to boldly yell out to the one person he suspects could do something.

There were probably other beggars there that day – all with varying degrees of need. But the only person we see receive healing is Bartimaeus, the one person in the crowd who knew that the Son of King David came to serve the neediest people – if only they would ask!

Take a moment to identify your own needs today, writing them down in a journal or a list. Are you willing to ‘make a scene’ in the presence of Jesus to have these needs met? If so, boldly tell Jesus what you need from him, trusting that He wants to meet your needs – even if it doesn’t always look like what we expect it to look like.

”

***WHAT DO
YOU WANT
ME TO DO
FOR YOU?***

“

MARK 10:51

LEAVING A LEGACY

GETTING STARTED

Today's devotional is focused on the life of Moses- specifically on the day that he dies. The story of Moses begins in Exodus, the 2nd book of the Old Testament. Four long books later, we find Moses at the top of a mountain gazing into the Promised Land. His journey, literally and metaphorically, is ending. Here are the highlights of Moses' story:

- The Jewish people are slaves to the Egyptians. As a baby, Moses' life is threatened when Pharaoh orders all Jewish infants to be killed. His mother desperately hides him among the reeds of the Nile where he is found by Pharaoh's daughter. (Exodus 2:1-6)
- Moses is raised in the palace among the Egyptians, his life spared. (Ex. 2:10)
- Moses kills an Egyptian and runs away in shame.(Ex. 2:11-15)
- Later, God speaks to him through a burning bush in the wilderness, calling him to free his people from slavery. (Ex. 3)
- Eventually, Moses leads the Jewish people out of slavery. He famously parts the Red Sea, ensuring their escape. (Ex. 12:31- Ex.14)

The Jewish people spend the next forty years wandering in the desert because of their repeated disobedience to God (Numbers 32:13). Yet God continues to care for them, providing them food and water and giving Moses the vision and wisdom needed to lead. Aside from Jesus, Moses is perhaps the most well documented character in Scripture. Yet, many people I know, including myself, aren't familiar with the end of his life. We focus so much on the beginning and the middle that we forget to finish the story.

DEUTERONOMY 34:1-12

1 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land... 4 Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."

5 And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. 6 He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. 7 Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. 8 The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over...

10 Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, 11 who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. 12 For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In v. 4, God shows Moses the whole land but he doesn't get to enter it (See Num. 20:8-12). He just finished leading his people for 40 years yet he doesn't get to enjoy the fruits of his labor. How would you feel if you were Moses?
2. What do you learn about Moses in this passage? What was he like as a leader?
3. What do you notice about how the people respond to Moses' death? What type of legacy did Moses leave?

CLOSING REFLECTION

When I think about Moses' life, I can't help but admire his tenacity and steadfastness. Moses endured and continued to cling to God, right up until the end of his life. Time and time again, the Jewish people mistrusted and disobeyed God, disrespecting Moses' leadership. Yet, his commitment did not waver. Moses certainly had his failures and he reaped the consequences (Num. 20:1-13), but he never gave up on God or his people.

How was Moses able to do this? All throughout Moses' leadership, we see him make intentional time to meet with God, to seek his guidance and simply be in his presence. Moses knew that he couldn't lead on his own; he needed God. Moses' vision and strength remained because he sought God for it and God provided. This begs the question, how much more do we need intentional rhythms of connecting with God?

In college, I led a Bible study in my sorority, Pi Beta Phi. I saw amazing things happen: sisters reconnected with Christ or encountered him for the first time, and I grew in my relationship with God. But there were many weeks where I'd arrive in the chapter room to lead and no one would show up. There were times when my sisters criticized and teased me for my faith. Often, I was discouraged and frustrated as a leader. Many times I just wanted to quit. When I graduated, sadly the Bible study did not continue. I was crushed and felt like my devotion to God was in vain.

But when I read about Moses' life, I'm so grateful that he persevered even though he didn't get to enter the Promised Land like he thought he would. When life didn't work out the way he hoped, he still was faithful to God until the end. Just recently, I've had several Pi Phi sisters reach out to me and tell me how grateful they were that I led a chapter Bible study. I look back on that time now with deep joy and gratitude that God met me in the midst of my discouragement and failure. And God has continued to work in unexpected ways at my alma matter- there is now a thriving Greek InterVarsity chapter with several Greek chapters leading Bible studies. My original picture of success- a thriving Pi Phi Bible study- was expanded by God in an unexpected way.

When I read about Moses' perseverance, even when he encountered deep failure, I think, "This is what I want! I want my vision to be clear and focused on God. Like Moses, I want to remain strong and committed until the end." Is this your desire as well? Maybe you're in a season where you're ready to quit and walk away from God or the circumstances in your life. Or maybe you're in a joyful season where following God seems easy and exciting. Either way, let's tenaciously pursue God, setting aside intentional time to connect with him. Let's radically trust that God will provide us the vision and strength we need. Let's end like Moses.

”

**WHEN LIFE
DOESN'T WORK
OUT LIKE WE
HOPE,
WILL WE STILL
BE FAITHFUL TO
GOD?**

“

DON'T SUCK AT REMEMBERING

A DEVOTIONAL FOR THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

GETTING STARTED

Did you know that the human brain consists of 1 billion neurons? It can hold approximately 1 quadrillion pieces of information, which means it is virtually limitless. Memories begin forming in the womb as early as 4 months!

So if the brain is so incredible, why can't we remember what we had for breakfast yesterday? The reason is, our short term memory kind of sucks. Short term memory can only hold around 7 pieces of information for 20 seconds. And many scientists think that's generous and estimate it to be as low as 4 pieces of information!

We live in a time where more information than ever before is accessed through just the strike of a key. Alexa. Siri. Iris. We even have our own digital personal assistants to remember things for us so that we don't have to!

Dr. Maria Wember of the University of Birmingham puts it this way:

"One could speculate that this [sucky short term memory] extends to personal memories, as constantly looking at the world through the lens of our smartphone camera may result in us trusting our smartphones to store our memories for us. This way, we pay less attention to life itself and become worse at remembering events from our own lives."

Our brains incredible but sorely limited by the culture around us. As more things demand our attention, are we forgetting the most important things?

Today's passage is all about remembering. We'll be looking at a conversation that God is having with his people in one of the earliest books of the Bible- Deuteronomy. God's people have been wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years and they are finally about to enter into the land that God has prepared for them to settle in.

DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18

11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. 17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Imagine you are one of the people getting ready to head into the promised land. You've been wandering around in the dessert for 40 years and now it's finally time to settle down. What thoughts and feelings are running through your mind? What feelings do you have toward God- bitterness? Joy? Relief? Anger? Trust?
2. What does God want his people to remember? What would happen if they forgot?
3. Read Exodus 16 & 17 to learn more about the water & manna that God references. What do you notice about God in these passages? What do you notice about his people? Why does God bring up water & manna here?
4. Read Deutronomy 8:11-18 again and notice everytime God says "forget" & "remember." What does God want you to understand about remembering and forgetting?
5. Why is it so crucial for us to practice remembering what God has done in our lives? What might happen to us if we don't do this?

CLOSING REFLECTION

So what is the solution to our short-term memory dilemma? Unlike us, the Israelites didn't have smartphones or Netflix, so in a way, it was easier for them to remember. According to neurologists the answer to our problem lies in our long-term memory. In order to remember the most important things, we must move them from short-term memory to long-term memory. But how do we do that?

For us, as people who long to deepen our faith in God, we must practice a discipline of regularly remembering what God has done in our lives. It's as simple as that. We must be people who carve out the necessary space to slow down and reflect, in opposition to a culture that entices us to binge and move to the next thing as fast as possible. We must be people who pay attention.

If we do not pause and remember God and his work in our lives, we run the risk of becoming people whose, "heart[s] will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Here is an idea on how you can pause and remember God this week.

Carve out an hour and head to a coffee shop or a park. Pull out a journal and reflect on the last school year. Ask yourself these questions:

- Over the last 9 months, where did God seem particularly close or near? Where did he seem distant?
- What was I most grateful for? What was I least grateful for?
- How did I respond to opportunities to share God's love? How did I miss or ignore opportunities to share God's love?
- What are several key ways that I grew in my relationship with God? If I could choose a key word or phrase to describe my spiritual life over the last 9 months, what would it be?

Once you have answered these questions, scan over what you wrote and look for any themes or repeated words that pop up to you. What does God want you to remember about him?

Consider using the first 3 questions every week, reflecting on your summer a week at a time so that you can pay attention to what God is up to.



”

**BE CAREFUL
THAT YOU
DO NOT
FORGET THE
LORD YOUR
GOD.**

“

DEUTERONOMY 8:11

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT THEME?

A BLOG FOR HALLOWEEN

Every few weeks it seems there's a new collection of photos from a fraternity or sorority party that makes its way around the web. Universities and/or National Headquarters get involved and punish the chapters and students involved. And then the problem is solved. Until it happens again...and again. And while social chairs probably never thought, "Hey! Let's choose a party theme that demeans another culture!", regardless of the intent, the result is hurt and confusion and a greater divide between people both inside and outside of the Greek system.

At Greek InterVarsity, we've realized in talking with Greeks from across the country that many of us are too embarrassed to ask one basic question—just why are these themes hurtful? I'd like to share three reasons why these parties were hurtful, in order to help us better understand and engage in racial reconciliation.

1. They destroy--rather than build--trust and relationship

Have you ever noticed that a close friend can tease you about something and you laugh, but if a stranger said the exact same thing you'd have a very different reaction? Someone I love can tell me I'm a ditzy sorority girl, and I laugh. I know they know that I am so much more than a ditzy sorority girl. But if a stranger or an acquaintance teases me with the exact same words, for all I know, that is all they see in me. The ability to tease and make fun of others without hurting them comes with relationship and trust.

The one-to-one example relationship provides some insight into how these party themes could be hurtful. But when the theme is about an entire group and not just an individual, the level of nuance and relationship that are necessary for proper understanding is almost impossible to achieve. To address it with a throwaway party theme only leads to pain, hurt and more distrust.

2. The costumes caricature ethnicities and cultures

A party theme based on race, ethnicity or culture essentially boils down an entire people group into one image. While I studied abroad in France, I was rather offended when some of my French friends referred to all American food as McDonald's. Sure, McDonald's is American, and I guiltily enjoy a good McDouble and fries as much as anyone, but there is so much more to American food than a measly fast food burger! I wanted my French friends to know about pancakes, bacon, pumpkin pie, steak, chocolate chip cookies, barbecue, Thanksgiving dinners, deviled eggs, and especially real, big, juicy cheeseburgers cooked on the grill and served with an ear of corn slathered in butter. McDonald's had, unfortunately, damaged my friends' views of a good cheeseburger and of all of American food.

A costume or party theme based on another culture does a similar thing--it puts an entire culture into one cheap imitation without acknowledging its beauty, richness, depth, or variety. Specifically, costumes and facepaint have long been used to mock, belittle and attack different racial groups. Though racial costumes didn't start a few years ago in the Greek system, there is an opportunity now to put an end to this legacy when it comes to our chapters.

3. These parties disrespect what other people value

Hugely important holidays and events became nothing more than an excuse to wear crazy costumes and drink. What would your mom say if you borrowed her clothes for a laugh at a Mothers' Day party? She would be hurt. Think of what kind of backlash there would be if an atheist group had an Easter themed party at which people dressed as a beat-up Jesus wearing a crown of thorns carrying a cross and then laughed about it and drank. That would be very hurtful to many who believe Easter is a significant holiday. Making light of what others value deeply disrespects them, what they value and who they are.

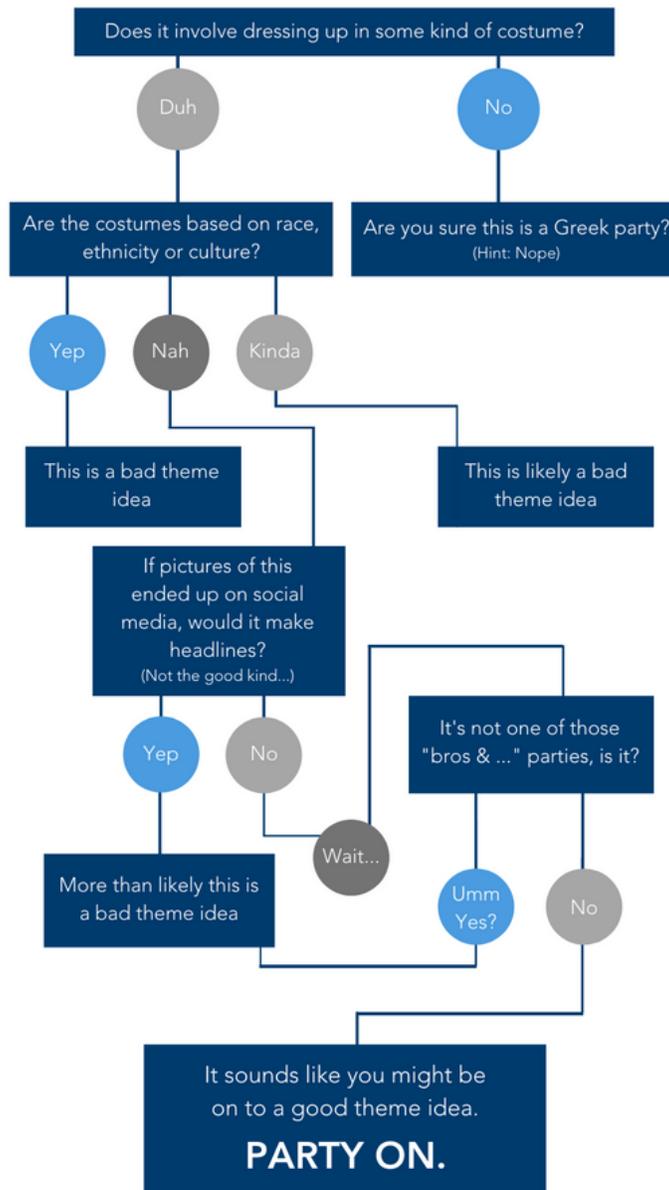
We need to learn

In case you have not figured this out yet, understanding our place in a very diverse and multi-ethnic world, nation, and university system is a messy and difficult issue. We here at Greek InterVarsity have been having conversations about racial and ethnic issues in the Greek system for several years now, and the more we talk, the more we realize that we need to learn. One thing we know, however, is that Jesus wants to bring reconciliation and healing to all areas of brokenness and hurt on the campus—and that includes the Greek system that we all love so much.

Chances are good that if you're in a Greek chapter and you're reading this, there will be a party theme presented at some point this year with a theme that presents an opportunity to disrespect a race, ethnicity or a people group. You may be the only one in your chapter willing to raise a red flag and speak up. Members might reply, "It's not that big of a deal" or downplay your objections. Based on the three reasons outlined above, it's not hard to demonstrate why themes like this are a bad idea, and even apart from anything in this article, very practically speaking these themes never end well for the chapters that participate in and promote them.

SO YOU'RE HAVING A THEME PARTY

A guide from



To learn more, visit greekiv.org

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**JESUS WANTS TO
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BROKENNESS & HURT
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**& THAT INCLUDES THE
GREEK SYSTEM.**

“

GIVING THANKS

WHEN YOU REALLY DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

A THANKSGIVING BLOG

The fall of my junior year was the hardest fall of my life. In September, my mom's cancer took a turn for the worse, and she ended up passing away in mid-October.

When Thanksgiving rolled around, we decided not to celebrate. We went to the movies instead. I avoided social media for a whole week. We didn't even eat pie. In the wake of my mom's death, the last thing I wanted to be was thankful. Still, to this day, I cringe a little inside as I see my friends' perfectly posed Instagram photos of their families on Thanksgiving, knowing that my Thanksgiving table will forever have an empty chair.

Giving thanks can be hard, especially when it seems like life has given you every reason not to be thankful. However, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells to give thanks in all circumstances. In the good, the bad, the hard, the joyful – as Christians, we are supposed to be marked by our thankfulness. How then, can you be thankful, when you really don't feel like it?

Here are a few things to remember this week:

THANKFULNESS IS CULTIVATED

If I want to be thankful, I need to practice being thankful. I think this is especially true when life doesn't seem to be going my way. If thankfulness is already a part of your routine, when life takes an unexpected turn or you are having a rough week, it will be much easier to continue to be thankful. What are some ways you can you cultivate thankfulness?

Start a thankfulness journal where you write down 5 things you are thankful for every day. Write thank you notes to people in your life that you are thankful for. Start every meal with friends by sharing something you are thankful for. Or place sticky notes around your bedroom with things you are thankful for written on them.

It doesn't take a whole lot of work or time to cultivate a discipline of giving thanks into your everyday!

THANKFULNESS GOES BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA

Thanksgiving Day Instagram posts, Facebook feeds, and tweets – while all good intentioned things, can often make being thankful even harder (when you already aren't feeling it). So, my tip? Shut off your phone and spend time with the people in front of you. Share stories around the table, pray together, play games; don't fall into the comparison trap.

Thankfulness is so much easier when you are focused on what is in front of you, instead of what isn't.

THANKFULNESS SHOULD LEAD US TO WORSHIP.

As we cultivate thankfulness this Thanksgiving, we need to remember why we are thankful. God is the giver of good gifts. Ultimately, everything we have and are comes from God. Our very existence is in His hands. As we give thanks, who better to thank than our creator and sustainer?

As you unplug and cultivate thankfulness this week, it is my prayer that your thankfulness will lead you to worship and that in all circumstances you will give thanks and praise to God.

”

**THANKFULNESS IS
SO MUCH EASIER
WHEN YOU ARE
FOCUSED ON
WHAT IS IN
FRONT OF YOU,
INSTEAD OF
WHAT ISN'T.**

“

GET READY

A DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT, WEEK 1

GETTING STARTED

The first Sunday in December marks the beginning of the season of Advent, the four-weeks leading up to the birth of Jesus. Advent, derived from the Latin word *Adventus*, means "the arrival" or "the coming."

The purpose of this season is to prepare us for Jesus' coming. In this season, we find ourselves preparing for "the coming" of many things: Initiation, finals, internship/study abroad opportunities, and of course, holiday parties with friends and family. Preparation is a large part of our lives. Imagine if you didn't prepare at all for your finals. Maybe you pull off a few decent grades because of an easy class, or sheer luck. But it's a good chance that you wouldn't do very well; you might even fail a class or two.

Or imagine if you waited until the day before Christmas to buy a meaningful gift for your mom. Who knows what's left on Target's shelves at 11pm on Christmas Eve? You have just become the poster-child for #ChristmasFail.

Our preparation is evidence that we care about something. And the converse, lack of preparation, shows a lack of care. Advent invites to explore what's really in our hearts. Do we actually care about Jesus' coming or is it just another day of the week?

So what does it look like to prepare for Jesus' birth? Today's devotional comes from the New Testament book of Romans, a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. Read this passage several times, talking with God about what you notice.

ROMANS 13:11-14

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Spend a few quiet moments asking yourself what God might be speaking to you through this passage. What is his invitation for you?

CLOSING REFLECTION

During a time of the year when sunlight is quickly depleting, the author Paul invites us to press in to the daylight. But to do this, we must leave behind our life in the darkness. During this season, I often want to hang out in the darkness- sip a little too much egg nog and hide in my house watching too much Netflix. Anything to escape reality because holidays are complicated for me.

My parents are divorced and living in different states. My sister and her family live all the way across the country from me. And it's often during this time that my issues with depression and anxiety threaten to pull me under. It's very easy for me to numb myself with alcohol and binge watching, biding my time until the holidays are over.

But God invites me to remember that his son, "the light of the world" who came to live among us and remove the darkness, has come and will come again. For the last several years, I've intentionally prepared for Jesus during Advent. I light a candle each Sunday to mark the time. And I intentionally look for ways to get out of the house, seeking the light of Christ through good friends who love me.

As Paul says, "the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Salvation is here. The freedom, peace, and wholeness that I so desire in my fractured world has come and will come again.

So what's in your heart? How is God inviting you to prepare for his coming?

”

***LET US PUT
ASIDE THE
DEEDS OF
DARKNESS
AND PUT ON
THE ARMOR
OF LIGHT***

“

ROMANS 13:12

HOPE IN WAITING

A DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT, WEEK 2

GETTING STARTED

Have you ever waited and waited for something? The release of a new movie, that certain someone to text you back, or graduation? Sometimes, it feels like forever! But the reason you wait is because you have at least a little bit of hope that it will happen.

The Advent season is a time of waiting. During Advent, we reflect on the hope of the Jewish people as they waited for their Messiah, and we wait expectantly for Jesus to come again and make the world right.

The Bible sets up not only the need, but the prophecy for the coming Savior all the way back in Genesis. This leaves the Israelites in hopeful waiting. They are told that the Messiah, a descendent of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), yet called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1), that a star will signify him (Numbers 24:17), and that he will be called names such as Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6). I could go on!

Every Old Testament prophecy about Jesus' birth is fulfilled in the accounts in the first and second chapters of Matthew and Luke! Yet, perhaps the most astonishing is the fulfillment of the prophecy below.

ISAIAH 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

MATTHEW 1:18-23

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why is the Messiah called Jesus? Why is he called Immanuel? How do these different names demonstrate the fulfillment of the hope of the Israelites?
2. Why might God choose to wait 700 years between foretelling Jesus' virgin birth and actually fulfilling his promise? What might he be teaching them/us?
3. What are you hoping and waiting for right now? How can you take hope in God's record of faithfulness as recorded throughout the Bible?

CLOSING REFLECTION

The song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is a favorite Christmas song of mine as it takes into its melody the prophecy of Isaiah and calls up the history of the Israelites who have mourned their exile-- a waiting period in itself-- and yearn for the Messiah. Then, the song moves powerfully into Jesus' victory over the grave and all evil in the world! There is hope, it exclaims. That hope comes from the fact that God came to be with us! Immanuel (God with us) represents God's love in two amazing ways.

First, God created us to be relational beings, so he is relational with us! The perfect Son of God and rightful heir to the heavenly throne, came to us to make his place among sinners in this broken, dirty, and painful world. He came not only to walk among us, but to walk with us! In fact, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus can relate to us and carry us through the waiting period.

Jesus came because he wants to have a personal relationship with you. He wants you to know him like he knows you. He cares to know you down to your core, and loves you despite your flaws.

Second, God is faithful! When he told Isaiah that prophecy and Isaiah communicated it to the Israelites, they had to wait over 700 years for it to be fulfilled. They probably began to doubt as time went on. They certainly strayed from God to pursue other "interests" and "gods." Despite their lack of faithfulness as they waited, God kept his promise, as he always does. He is faithful, so we can trust him!

There is hope in the waiting, and that hope is Jesus, Immanuel, God with you.

”

***THERE IS HOPE
IN THE
WAITING, AND
THAT HOPE IS
JESUS,
IMMANUEL,
GOD WITH
YOU.***

“

GIVE US PEACE

A DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT, WEEK 3

GETTING STARTED

Years ago I wrote a mashup. Well, a Scripture mashup. I was feeling down one day and just sighed a prayer, "Lord, will you give me a song?" I started looking up Bible verses about peace and before I knew it, several verses fell into place and God gave me a melody to go with it. You can't hear the melody, but here's the lyrics:

Now may the Lord of Peace Himself
Give you peace in every way.
And, in every way, And in every way,
May the Lord be with you all.
He is the Prince of Peace of whom the angels sang
When they said "Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests!"
He said Peace I give you; My peace I leave with you.
Do not let your hearts be afraid.
(2 Thessalonians 3:16, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 2:14, John 14:2)

I am drawn to Jesus' title, Prince of Peace. Why peace? Why not the Prince of Love? Or the Prince of Faithfulness? A prince is a ruler or monarch who has sovereignty. It is fascinating that Jesus has absolute authority over peace. It is his to share or give away. And that he did. And that he does.

COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What does it mean for you to have peace with God?
2. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Matthew 20:32)
Where would you like Jesus to bring you peace or reconciliation today?
Take time to ask him for that now.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Jesus, the owner of peace, shared it with us! He restored the estranged relationship between God and us. We sinned and turned away from God to live our own way. "And while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Jesus mediated peace between us and God through his blood. We are sinners in need of forgiveness. Christ offers us that forgiveness and then makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The discord in my soul was gone when I asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins. I now had a relationship with the benevolent Prince of Peace!

I remember calling my dad in college when I was totally stressed out during finals week and he taught me a simple prayer that aligned with my breathing: "Lord Jesus Christ, give me peace." I sat in a quiet place, closed my eyes and slowed my breathing. On the inhale I prayed, "Lord Jesus Christ," and on the exhale I prayed, "give me peace." I prayed that while I breathed for several minutes. And, Jesus who loves to be generous, shared peace with me! The stress wasn't as prominent. I wasn't consumed by thinking only of studying and exams. Jesus gave me peace in the midst of the circumstances. And there have been many, many times since then that I have prayed this prayer for peace.

As you prepare for Christmas, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." (Colossians 3:15)

”

**LET THE
PEACE OF
CHRIST RULE
IN YOUR
HEARTS**

“

COLOSSIANS 3:15

CHOOSE LOVE

A DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT, WEEK 4

GETTING STARTED

One December, I went to visit my grandfather. My parents & I sat down in the living room after a lovely dinner & began to watch a Hallmark movie. About thirty minutes into the movie my grandfather walked in.

He said, "Are we at the conflict yet?"

We all began to laugh & said, "What do you mean?"

He replied, "Everyone knows that every Hallmark Christmas movie starts out joyfully, then there is a conflict, and finally everyone ends happily in love or with a 'Christmas miracle.'"

As we all began to laugh at his observation (because we all knew it was true) it made me think about what these different Christmas movies are teaching us about love & happy endings. My friends are still in wild debate over whether Love Actually or The Holiday is the best Christmas love movie of the season (we all know it's The Holiday, but we won't go there).

In these movies we are taught to see love as something that is magical, desired, and happened upon. It falls into the laps of the characters & they are seemingly naive until they realize they are deeply in love. This love is very different than the love we learn about in Scripture.

In Scripture we see that love is a choice, rather than a feeling or coincidence. It is purposeful, powerful, and overwhelming. It is by God, for God, and is the very character of God himself.

During the fourth week of Advent, we are called to reflect upon God's love- his love for his people & the choice he made to bear Jesus into the world as a manifestation of that love. Read Ephesians 1:1-12 and reflect upon God's love & will for us as his adopted sons & daughters.

EPHESIANS 1:3-12

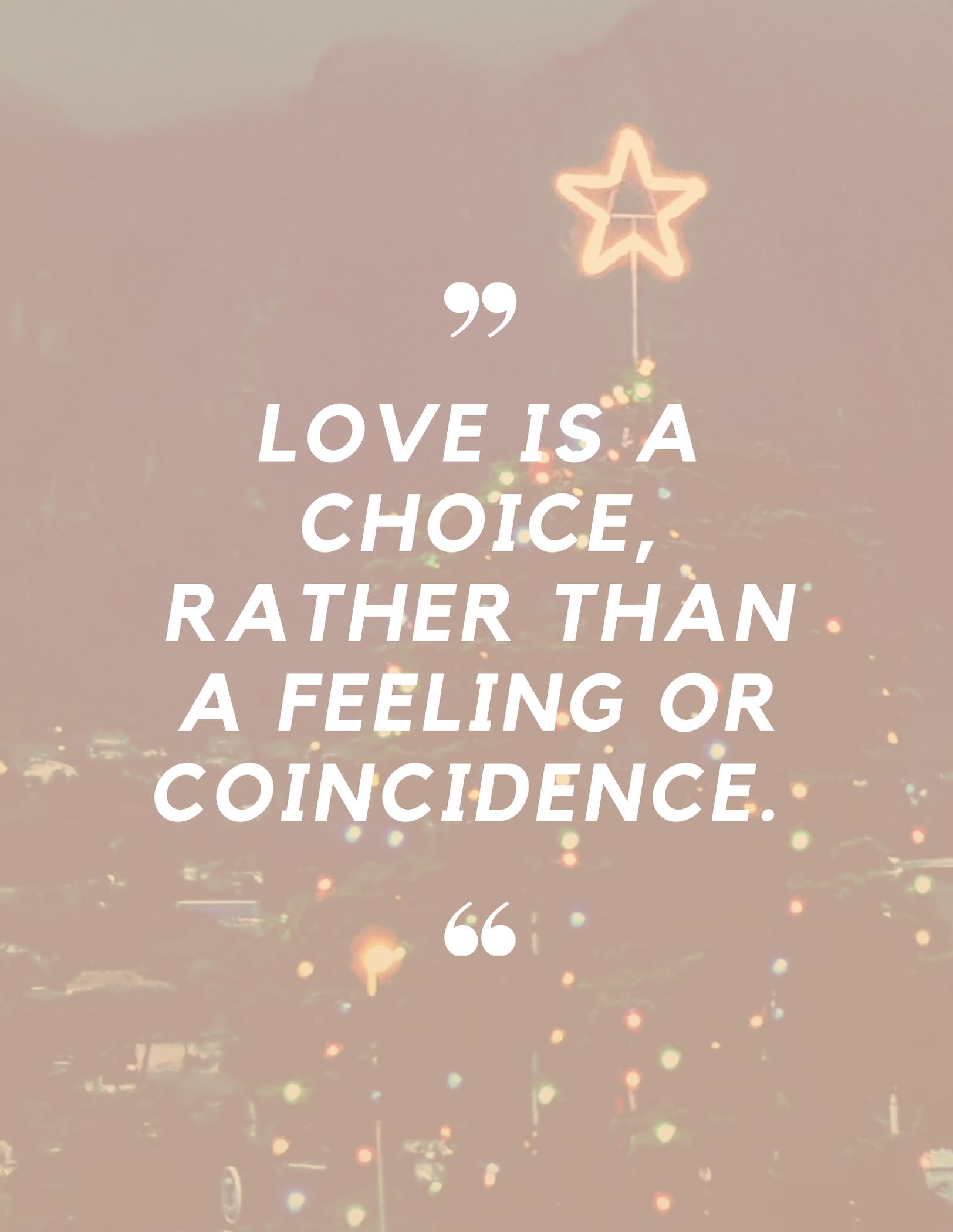
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory

CLOSING REFLECTION

Isn't it amazing to know that God chose us before we were even born? God made an active choice to love us & provide a Savior for us because he knew that we would need Jesus. Through Jesus, we are redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled to God to live joyfully in relationship with him.

Our lives are not a Hallmark movie where we have to wait until the end to see if we will be loved & if all will end well. God is actively pursuing us now & wants us to receive the love that he freely gives. The birth of Jesus is the ultimate love story because it is a love story of sacrifice for a people who don't really deserve to be loved at all.

As you enter into the fourth week of Advent, how do you need to respond to the love that God may be extending to you? How do you need to continue to reflect, consider, and meditate on Jesus' birth & God's pursuit of you in this Advent season?



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***LOVE IS A
CHOICE,
RATHER THAN
A FEELING OR
COINCIDENCE.***

“

CELEBRATING ST. PATRICK

THREE THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT ST. PATRICK

March 17th marks St. Patrick's Day. Many college campuses celebrate this holiday by...getting drunk. However, there's a lot more to the holiday and to Saint Patrick himself than green beer, bagpipe music and shamrock shakes. As you think about St Patrick's Day, here are three things you might not have known.

1. Saint Patrick was a missionary to Ireland

You might not know that St. Patrick is often referred to as one of the greatest Christian missionaries in the history of the Church. He was born in Great Britain in the 4th Century A.D., when it was still ruled by the Romans. As a teenager, he was captured by Irish raiders and taken as a slave to Ireland. He escaped and returned to his family after six years. He developed a deep love for his Irish captors and later went back to share the good news of Christ with the people who had oppressed and enslaved him. What radical Christianity - to go back to one's captors with the love of Christ.

2. Until the mid 19th century, St Patrick's Day was primarily a religious holiday

The first Saint Patrick's day parade was held in Boston in 1737. Before it became celebrated by Irish-Americans though, it was first known as a "Feast Day" within the Catholic Church beginning in the mid 17th century. What is a feast day? You can read more about it [here](#). The day was marked by families and members of the community attending church together and remembering the life and deeds of Saint Patrick.

3. Saint Patrick's Day is made for celebrating

This isn't to throw a wet blanket on celebrating Saint Patrick's Day celebrations. It is a reminder that as Christians, there's more to the holiday than leprechaun costumes and excessive drinking. It's likely that many of your fraternity brothers and sorority sisters will be celebrating the holiday by skipping class and enjoying themselves along with the rest of campus. As a Christian, how can you celebrate Saint Patrick's day by loving your brothers and sisters well, while still enjoying the celebration with them?

St. Patrick had a deep, personal relationship with Christ and lived a life centered on Christ. There's a hymn that is often attributed to Saint Patrick that offers great words to reflect on. Just thought you may like to know this as you engage the campus on St. Patrick's Day.

"Christ be with me, Christ within me;
Christ behind me, Christ before me;
Christ beside me, Christ to win me;
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger;
Christ in hearts of all who love me;
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger."

A PRAYER FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY

St. Patrick's Day Sophomore Year:

A drunk stranger sleeping in my living room. Roommates passed out in their bedrooms. All of a sudden I heard a loud crash at the door of my apartment. Stumbling in the door was our downstairs neighbor, the words, "Oops! Wrong apartment!" slurred out of his mouth. After he walked back out, I locked the door this time. A stream of judgmental words and complaints crammed into my brain as I tried once again to go to sleep

St. Patrick's Day Junior Year:

Indulging in green beer. Almost making out with that guy from my Psych class. Dodging the weird-o trying to get me to do jello shots with him.

When I saw a friend from Greek IV in the room, we sheepishly grinned at one another and stealthily avoided each other the rest of the evening. The next morning I had the worst hangover with even worse guilt over my actions from the night before.

Love it or hate it, St. Patrick's Day has become a day of intense revelry in Western culture. Over the years, I found myself engaging in one of two extremes- avoiding it altogether and judging those who overindulge. OR being the person who overindulges, navigating regret and nausea the next day.

God's call on St. Patrick's Day is for us to be people who model St. Patrick's deep love and commitment to the people around us.

But the true story of St. Patrick is one of risky love and courageous leadership. I won't go into detail except to say that St. Patrick engaged the culture around him so well that he was willing to face oppression and even death to love the very people who once enslaved him.

I think God's invitation for us as we navigate St. Patrick's Day is to do so free of judgement and free of overindulgence. God's call on St. Patrick's Day is for us to be people who model St. Patrick's deep love and commitment to the people around us. So as you make your way out to a St. Paddy's party, here's a prayer you can say to help you embody the bold life of St. Patrick.

A PRAYER FOR THE ST. PADDY'S DAY PARTY

(adapted from an actual prayer attributed to St. Patrick)

Christ be with me, Christ within me,

(Whether I walk through the doors of the church or the doors of a bar,)

Christ behind me, Christ before me,

(In the basement of my fraternity house,)

Christ beside me, Christ to win me,

(Remind me that my identity is in you. I am free of what others think of me.)

Christ to comfort and restore me,

(When my sisters/brothers judge me for not doing a keg stand,)

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

(When I am cleaning up spilled beer and when I am helping a drunk friend head back to her home,)

Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,

(Whether the party is chill or out of control, you are with me. Help me to take risky action to protect my friends. Help me to make wise choices that protect myself.)

Christ in the hearts of all that love me,

(Who is keeping me accountable today? Remind me of the people who support me in my decision to follow you, even if it's unpopular.)

Christ in the mouth of friend and stranger.

(Teach me to see everyone I encounter as a loved child of yours. Provide me with opportunities to share about you with others this evening.)

In the name of the sacred Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This St. Patrick's day, let's be people who boldly love those around us. Let's have the grace and patience to see beyond others' behavior to their identities as loved children of God. And let's have the courage and humility to ask friends to keep us accountable for our choices. May we honor God with our mind, body and soul.

PRAYER OF ST. PATRICK

CHRIST BE WITH ME, CHRIST WITHIN ME;
CHRIST BEHIND ME, CHRIST BEFORE ME;
CHRIST BESIDE ME, CHRIST TO WIN ME;
CHRIST TO COMFORT AND RESTORE ME.
CHRIST BENEATH ME, CHRIST ABOVE ME;
CHRIST IN QUIET, CHRIST IN DANGER;
CHRIST IN HEARTS OF ALL WHO LOVE ME;
CHRIST IN MOUTH OF FRIEND AND STRANGER.

HOW IS GOOD FRIDAY "GOOD"?

A DEVOTIONAL FOR GOOD FRIDAY

GETTING STARTED

I grew up in a traditional Methodist church. We recognized Advent, Lent, Easter and everything in between. But if you asked me if I understood why we observed Easter the way we did, I would have no idea. Words like "atonement", "sacrificial lamb", and "Good Friday" went over my head.

Years later, when the Gospel made sense to me and I began a relationship with Jesus, I would wonder, "If Jesus died on Friday of Easter weekend, why the heck do Christians call it 'Good Friday'?! Shouldn't it be called 'Bad Friday'?"

Today's passage comes from the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, Isaiah received a prophecy from God about a Messiah who would come and redeem his people.

ISAIAH 53:4-5

4 "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Read this passage several times, slowly. What words or phrases strike you most from this passage? Jot them down in a journal.
2. What is this Messiah like, according to Isaiah?
3. Think about the pain and suffering you see in yourself and in the world around you. How does Jesus relate to this?

CLOSING REFLECTION

I'll never forget the first time a student disclosed to me that she had been sexually assaulted. When I was a student, I knew women who had been sexually assaulted. But this was different. This was a student involved in the ministry I was leading, a student whom I deeply loved and who God entrusted to me to care for and invest in.

As we sat in her bedroom in her sorority house, I listened, with tears streaming down my face, as she shared about the pain, anger, and suffering. To a small degree, I experienced that pain with her. On the cross, Jesus bore our pain and suffering to the fullest. He literally took on all of the suffering of the entire world- both the pain that has been done to us and the pain we have done to others. Good Friday is good in the sense that Jesus' death is for our good.

The real meaning of goodness during Easter weekend isn't happiness or a nice feeling- although that might be part of it. Goodness means a life of wholeness- where everything is made right and just and whole again. Jesus, our God in the flesh, went to the cross to free the world of sin and suffering, giving us the possibility of freedom and healing for our pain and forgiveness for the pain we have caused others.

Through his death on the cross, we can experience his "goodness"- the life of freedom and wholeness that we don't deserve but that God graciously gives us through his son. And that is a very good thing.

Throughout the day, ask Jesus to show you how he is bearing your pain and the pain of the world. Talk to him about your suffering and ask him to bring his "goodness"- his freedom, justice, and wholeness- to your brokenness.

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**BUT HE WAS
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“

ISAIAH 53:5

THROUGH HIS DEATH WE RECEIVE LIFE

A DEVOTIONAL FOR EASTER SUNDAY

GETTING STARTED

Several years ago, on the Saturday before Easter started out as a peaceful day. My housemate was moving into our new house and as I waited for her to arrive, I watched my new street and dreamed about opportunities we would have. I never expected what would happen next.

My housemate and I were inside unpacking when a friend of hers noticed there was a man lying in the street surrounded by a couple friends. A neighbor quickly approached and started performing CPR. As we watched from the windows, the street in front of our house filled with police cars, fire trucks, ambulances. They blocked off the street with yellow tape and we waited for minutes that felt like hours for a glimpse of hope that he would be ok.

As the seconds ticked by, there was no sign of him being taken to the ambulance. Hope for his recovery started ticking away as well. We got word from people watching on the street that he was declared dead. We heard rumors of what could have happened. Drug overdose. Heart attack. Gunshot wound. We were separated by a pane of glass and a front yard during his final breaths, yet we had no connection to who he was or knew any details about him.

Watching him in his last few moments was the first shock of the day. Watching his family arrive and find out the news was the second shock. I can still see his mother dropping to her knees and wailing. I can see the police officers wrestling her away and then comforting her as she laid on the same tar as her son.

The next morning I hesitantly arrived at church. I felt off-balance from the horrific events of Saturday and the joy I was expected to feel on Easter. As we sang songs thanking God that Jesus was resurrected from the dead so many years ago, I wept for the man who had just died yesterday.

As you read today's passage, imagine that you are Mary Magdalene, a friend of Jesus who is mourning this great loss and doesn't think she will see her friend again.

JOHN 20:11-18

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What stands out to you about Jesus and Mary Magdalene's interaction?
2. If you were Mary in this passage, what would this experience have been like for you?
3. What has your relationship with Easter been like over the years? Are you familiar with what the story of Jesus' resurrection is or do you feel like you're going through the motions without knowing why?
4. What posture do you have going into Easter weekend? How do your past experiences or ideas shape your view of it now?
5. Who are some people in your life that you want to talk to about their view of what Easter really means?

CLOSING REFLECTION

I didn't realize how much I tried to control my celebration of Easter until my experience last year. After watching this man's mother react to her son's death, I had a new understanding of the pain people would have been feeling after Jesus' death. When it hit me that the man I saw die the day before was not coming back in three days, I had new understanding of how great a gift Jesus' resurrection in three days really is. In my struggle to know how to engage with this event that I witnessed, I was much more aware of how God can sit in the tension of deep pain, suffering, and even death and bring new hope to it.

Easter is the culmination of the worst event in history and the beginning of the best event for all eternity. It is a celebration that is marked by death and strangely, joy- which makes it hard to know how to celebrate it. But Jesus is right there in the middle of these seemingly conflicting emotions. He bore the worst of our pain and suffering so that we could also experience the deep joy and freedom through his resurrection. Through his death, we receive life to the fullest.

On this Easter, take a moment and check what you're thinking of this celebration. What are ways that you can become more aware of what Easter means for you today?

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***THROUGH
JESUS'
DEATH, WE
RECEIVE LIFE
TO THE
FULLEST.***

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