Duke InterVarsity Winter Devotional
2012-2013
December 8-January 8
Dear friend,

In Psalm 54:4 it says, "Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me." It is our hope that even with finals, you’re able to pray and spend time with God and to keep Him in your thoughts and in your heart. Whether you’re new to spending time with God or you make it a part of your daily routine, our prayer is that this devotional may help you to stay connected to Him during this Winter Break, that through each entry, prayer, reflection, and activity you may grow closer and closer to the Lord, learn more about Jesus and maybe even learn a little about yourself.

Our Heavenly Father, is slowly molding our hearts and changing our lives. He is working in us and through us and in those surrounding us. He loves us so much. It is our prayer that you may see His infinite and unconditional love for you. He was, is, and will always be with you. In a poem called Footprints it says, "My precious child, I never left you during your time of trial. Where you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

With peace, love, and joy

IV Prayer Team 2012-2013

Daisy Grijalva
Vivian Tsang
Andre Aganbi
Crystal Owens
Journal

How important are academics to you? Why? What do you sacrifice when you put academics first?
Matthew 5:48
*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Why such a heavy burden? Does not the Lord Jesus say, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light?” (Matthew 11:29-30 ESV) Why then does he demand so much of us? Is Jesus setting us up for failure? Is he demanding that we get perfect scores, become perfect family members and friends, and speak with perfection? When a rich man comes to Jesus he inquires what he must do to be saved; Jesus responds: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” And the passage continues: “When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Many of us could easily say that we are aiming for perfection in trying to get the top grades, but in doing so, many of us neglect Jesus’ calling to things that are more important. Jesus says you have the power to draw near to perfection if only you are willing to give away the things that are keeping you from following him. For the rich man, it was wealth and possessions. For Duke students, who have been given many opportunities and been blessed by God with intelligence, is it grades? I ask you this day, “What do you treasure most?” In an environment that drives you toward careers, success, money, and power, have you found that not having these things would produce in you greater sorrow than seeing your Savior nailed to a tree? I pray that it would. Lay down the things you are holding on to, that you may take up your cross and let the Lord lead you to perfection. May the Lord’s face shine upon you.

*David Chou, ’15*
Valley of Vision (a Puritan Prayer)

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in the depths but see Thee in the heights; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision. Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine; let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy life in my death, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley.

Take some time to reflect on:

- the times that God has placed you in the valley
- the value of being in the valley
- why God has placed you there

Jenny Pan, '12
The world tells you every day that grades are one of the most important things in the world, but they aren’t. The world also tells you that having a good job is one of the most important things in the world, but it isn’t. The world will also tell you that having financial stability is one of the most important things in the world, but it isn’t. These things promise security and happiness, but in the end, they cause us to stress out and worry, ultimately robbing us of joy. Unfortunately, at a place like Duke where most students value these things above all else, it’s hard not to dwell upon these things and begin to idolize them. In light of the Gospel, I urge you to fight against the lies of the world daily and remind yourself of what is truly important – Christ’s work on the cross.

**Colossians 3:1-4**

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

**Philippians 3:7-11**

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Where are you right now? Are you currently buying into the deceptive lies of the world? If so, praise the Lord for revealing that to you and fight against those lies with the Gospel. We are all sinners who were bound for hell. But God, rich in mercy, sent Christ to live the lives that we failed to live and die the deaths that we deserved. Through His work on the cross, our eternity in Heaven is secure. The most important thing in life is knowing where we are going when we die, and if we have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, our eternities in Heaven are secure in Christ’s work on the Cross. So stop dwelling on grades, jobs and money, and dwell on the heavenly dwelling that Christ has secured for us.

*Anonymous*
It's the end of the semester, and things are...stressful. "I have this many exams, this many papers—oh, and this big project, too. And I promised to help my friend's brother's girlfriend's best friend with her college applications."

It's hard not to focus on the list of things we have to get through, and it's easy to think about me, me, and me. Especially as students, we're obsessed with thinking about who we were, who we currently are, and who we will become.

But wait—do we think about who God is nearly as much? Do we know who God was, who God is, and who God will continue to be? If someone asked me that question right now, what would I say? Would I even be able to say anything specific? Today, let's spend some time in a prayer activity to know and remember who our Creator, our Father, our Friend, our Lover, our Provider, and our Protector is.

Divide a sheet of paper into as many columns as there are letters in your first name. If your name is Grace, make five columns. At the top of each column, write one letter of your name: G R A C E

Under each letter, write down one or two attributes of God that start with that same letter. Maybe even write a few short sentences or bullet points about why those attributes are God to you. Was there a specific moment in your life in which God revealed this characteristic of Himself to you? Is there a Bible verse that tells you this of God? Did you hear it from a sermon or a friend?

After the writing activity, use your sheet as a guide and spend prayer time in praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is. The paper can also be a good reminder during those times when God feels far away or I feel too big or I feel insignificant. We will be able to humbly remember and boldly declare that the God we believe in is _____, _____, and _____.

Grace Shin, ‘14


Encouragement for the Exhausted

1. Whatever God has called you to start, He will empower you to complete.
The Bible says that “He who began a good work in you will carry it through to completion.” It’s reassuring to remember that God’s work in our lives is based on His strength and not ours. He just calls us to be faithful, obedient, and to continue towards the finish line.

2. God is Bigger than whatever is stressing you out!
It’s encouraging just to remember that one hundred years from now, whatever seems so big and impossible to me in this moment will seem very insignificant but God will still be All-Powerful and the one taking care of us for Eternity.

3. Being Busy doesn’t impress God.
I think sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that if we’re not constantly wearing ourselves out, then we’re not pleasing God. He never called us to break our backs to impress Him. In fact, even though life will often be hard, Jesus promises to be our Oasis. Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Rest in the knowledge that God loves you, He is with you, and no matter what you’re going through, He will be the one to carry you through!

www.spiritualinspiration.tumblr.com
A Student’s Prayer

Dear God, knowledge is such a key to my future as well as an important part of today. I am studying a lot and learning so much. There are times when I am amazed at the new things I am coming to understand, and there are other times when I am bewildered by what I can’t comprehend. Regardless, I want you to take a part of it all. Help me to stay focused when I get distracted and to be patient when I get distracted and to be patient when I get anxious. Allow me to explore new thoughts and be humbled by the mysteries of life. Grant me balance so that I get a lot out of this educational experience while not making it an end in itself. I know that you are the way, the truth, and the life—lead me as I study each day. Amen.

Author Unknown
Proverbs 16

1 The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.
2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.
3 Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.
4 The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.
5 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.
6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.
7 When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
8 Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

9 The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Remember God’s plan. Often we get lost trying to discern his plan for us. And while it is good to look for what the Lord has for us, it is also good if not better to rest in the fact that he does have something in store for us. Take comfort that it is not in our own often fumbling hands that we must take up our own burdens. We often get so wrapped up looking for what God has in store for us that we forget that we must start out trusting that he has something for us to find.

In his heart a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his step.

Ruiji Jiang, ’13
When something does not go the way I plan,
I see it as failing, each one a loss;
The weight bears down on me -- my albatross;
I had tried my best. I don't think I can
take any more; darkness enters my span;
Flung into the abyss I, helpless, toss
and turn and sink until I see the cross,
The only source of light, and hope began.
Out of the darkness, a strong hand clasps mine,
Lifting me from the depths into the light;
Only One can do that, His pow'r divine;
Times like these are when God gives me a sign;
I'm not worthless. I'm strengthened by His might;
God's plan for me will be that which will shine.

Anonymous
Isaiah 40:28-31

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

The beauty of rest is that it is abundantly and willingly provided by Him. He has taken our burdens upon Him and offers us renewal of strength. We just need to come before Him and wait upon His presence. When we are the weakest, He is the most able.

Prayer
Father, thank you that you are my sustainer, for You never grow faint or weary. My soul waits for You. Would You give me rest and fill me with power, that I may soar high with wings like eagles.

Grace Han, '15
Matthew 11:18-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Thank you, Lord, for never giving us more than we can take, for holding our hands in hard times, and for placing us in communities of love. Please remind us daily that you are here to be with us and comfort us. We are least alone in the times that we feel most lonely. In the midst of life, remind us that life is beautiful and so are we. Remind us that we do not need to do it all, and all by ourselves. Thank you, Lord, for rest in your embrace. Amen.

Cathay Wu, '14
Galatians 5: 13-26

How great is the blessing of freedom that God has given us? Because we are no longer slaves to sin, we have the freedom to decide for ourselves what we do.

But are we truly free? What is in store for the Christian?

In Romans 6: 18, Paul tells us: “you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

What? How are we free when we were released from our chains of sin, only to be shackled by a new form of servitude? We are now God’s servants. What sort of freedom can be found in that? Is it the same as being a servant to Satan?

No!

We have a choice now. God accepted us, so instead of living in evil, we now have a choice to do what is good. As for our freedom, we are free only within the boundary set by God. But spiritual existence is boundless, made so by God. God’s bounds are in infinity, so our freedom is greater and wider than perceived “freedom” by the unsaved. Only where God is, there is true freedom. We are no longer bound by the sinful, natural desires of the world. Instead, the Spirit of the Lord leads us, therefore freeing us from natural law. And with the Spirit leading us, we will produce fruits of righteousness. We are also blessed with the inheritance of the kingdom of God!

Take some time right now and listen to the song “Where the Spirit of the Lord is” (Acoustic). If you type it into YouTube, it will be the first song that pops up.

I invite you to close your eyes and meditate as you listen to this song. Listen to the lyrics. Enjoy God’s presence, and find rest in him.

Lukang Xiao, ’13
Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

How great it is when we abide in Jesus, and how terrible when we are separate! For when we rely on him for life itself, as a branch must depend on the vine and the roots, we see many good things come of our lives to build up his kingdom, and we experience the growth of the fruits of the spirit in our lives through his power and Spirit in us. But when we are distant from Christ, our lives are empty and ineffectual, even worthless and dead. Why, then, would one choose to live for himself, when by turning again to Jesus we may see love, and joy, and peace grow in our lives? See where your life is dry, and join the vine there. Come, abide fully in Jesus, abide in love and glorify the Father in heaven!

Lord, thank you for the life and the character you are developing in our persons. We pray that you would continue to bless us and grow us in love for you and cause us to depend utterly on you, knowing that through that and only through that ultimate trust in you will our lives be changed to reflect your nature. Amen.

Crystal Owens, ’15
Don’t Stop the Madness

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...” Job 13:15

I’m sitting in a small airport in Montana right now, sleep deprived and delayed. I’ve been gone from my family for what feels like forever and just want to get home. You know that feeling right? When you just want to get home? But as I sit here on the floor and stare red eyed at my computer screen, I have to remember one thing.

God seldom works in the easy and comfortable.

Can He? Sure. Does He? Sometimes. But more often than not, the times that shape me, the times that make me more loving and more gracious, aren’t usually what I look back on as “good times.”

Isn’t that strange?

I mean, sure we all want to be considered “gracious,” but who wants to have to go through being wronged so that they actually have the opportunity to grow in grace? So I’m left in a bit of a conundrum. Sitting here on the floor, killing time watching people beat the snack machine, I have a choice. I could do the easy thing. Do what I’d usually do in this situation. I could moan and whine, complain that there’s no reason our plane is delayed, and disdainfully announce that I will never fly with this incompetent airline again; or I can take a step back. Take a deep breath. Do the impossible. By His grace I can take the hard road that leads to life. I can think on the sovereignty and goodness of God. Think on His promise that He is able to work everything together into something beautiful. Yes, even this seemingly meaningless inconvenience might just be the hand of God at work to grow patience, kindness and goodness in me.

But we don’t like to think that way though do we?

I don’t.

It’s hard. It’s complicated to reconcile a God who works through pain. It’s tough to trust in a Lord who allows suffering and inconvenience. It’d be a whole lot easier to mindlessly promise myself that Jesus always wants to make life easy, but I don’t think that’s how He works.

If anything, Jesus uses dark colors when He paints. He’s into streams in the desert and life out of death. Just take one good look at the cross and that ought to convince you that the God the Bible speaks of is a God who uses horror and injustice to His advantage.
The cross is evidence to our minds, and balm for our souls that our God is a God who brings beauty out of pain. Art out of chaos. Beauty out of ugliness. Or as some of the poets have said, He conquers death by death itself. Our Redeemer beat Death at his own game.

Hope rises.

When we trust Christ, and the mysterious work on Calvary, we trust that He’s always up to something good even in the darkest days. In fact, that’s probably when He’s up to the most good, because that’s when the most good grows in me.

So hey, I’m delayed, I’m uncomfortable, but if this is the path the Lord has brought me down, then I say, “Don’t stop it Lord.” Redemption was born on a far darker day than this one, so bring the chaos. Bring the madness. Do whatever you’ve got to do to recreate my heart. After all, it’s me that needs to change, not my circumstances.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18

Mike Donehey (lead singer of Tenth Avenue North), http://mikedonehey.tumblr.com
You Are Love (lyrics)

A mind full of questions
And a heart full of pain
Can’t understand why we are here again

But there’s grace in this season
Not just to see us through
But to renew us

You are love Lord
And Your ways testify
You are love Lord
Perfectly defined
Through the suffering or joy
We will confide in Your perfect love

A mind full of questions
And a future unclear
But Your perfect love scatters fear

‘Cos Your will is to build up
And not to harm
But to complete us

It's time to stretch these legs of faith
And run into this unknown width
With truth of Your love for us

Rend Collective Experiment
GOD WITH US

The people had read of this rescue that was coming through the bloodline of Abraham
They had seen where Micah proclaimed about a ruler to be born in Bethlehem
Daniel prophecy about the restoration of Jerusalem
Isaiah’s cry about the Son of God coming to them
So for them—it was anticipation
This groaning was growing, generation after generation
Knowing He was holy, no matter what the situation
But they longed for Him
They yearned for Him
They waited for Him on the edge of their seat
On the edge of where excitement and containment meet
They waited
Like a child watches out the window for their father to return from work—they waited
Like a groom stares at the double doors at the back of the church—they waited
And in their waiting, they had hope
Hope that was fully pledged to a God they had not seen
To a God who had promised a King
A King who would reign over the enemy
Over Satan’s tyranny
They waited
So it was
Centuries of expectations, with various combinations of differing schools of thought
Some people expecting a political king who would rise to the throne through the wars that he fought
While others expecting a priest who would restore peace through the penetration of the Pharisee’s façade
Yet a baby—100% human, 100% God
So the Word became flesh and was here to dwell among us
In His fullness, grace upon grace, Jesus
Through Him and for Him, all things were created
And in Him all things are sustained
God had made Himself known for the glory of His name
And this child would one day rise as King
But it would not be by the sword or an insurgent regime
It would be by His life
A life that would revolutionize everything the world knew
He would endure temptation and persecution, all while staying true
Humbly healing the broken, the sick and hurting too
Ministering reconciliation, turning the old to new
A life that would be the very definition of what life really costs
Saying—if you desire life, then your current one must be lost
And He would portray that with His own life as His Father would pour out and exhaust
And Jesus would be obedient to the point of death, even death upon the cross
So just 33 years after the day that He laid swaddled in the hay
He hung on a tree suffocating, dying in our place
Absorbing wrath that is rightly ours, but we could never bear the weight
So He took that punishment and he put it in the grave
And He died
And when I say that He died, what I mean is that He died
No breath, no heartbeat, no sign of life
God is a God of justice, and the penalty for our sin equals death
That’s what Christ did on that cross
Then... On the third day, in accordance with scriptures, He was raised from the grave
And when I say that He was raised, what I mean is that He was raised
Lungs breathing, heart pumping, blood pulsing through His veins
The things that He promised were true
He is the risen Son of God, offering life to me and you
Turning our mourning into dancing
Our weeping into laughing
Our sadness into joy
By His mercy, we are called His own
By His grace, we will never be left alone
By His love, He is preparing our home
By His blood, we can sing before His throne
Jesus paid it all
All to Him I owe
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow
So now we, as His bride, are the ones waiting
Like the saints that came before, we’re anticipating
He has shown us that this world is fading
And He has caused our desire to be for Him
So church, stay ready
Keep your heart focused and your eyes steady
Worship Him freely, never forgetting
His great love for you
Immanuel, God with us

Matthew 1:18-25

In this passage, we read the story of Joseph as he experiences the virgin birth of Christ. It is truly an incredible story, and begins with a difficult situation for Joseph. He learns that the woman pledged to him, Mary, is already pregnant! It can sometimes be easy to pass over this if we’ve heard the story many times, but this is actually incredibly dramatic. I can’t even imagine being in Joseph’s position. Later on, Joseph is even visited by an angel who tells him that Mary will give birth to a son, and Joseph should name the baby boy Jesus. Indeed, Joseph’s experience recorded here is a remarkable tale!

However, there is more at play. Joseph is not the main character and the birth is not the whole story. We read on. The baby boy is to be called Jesus because “he will save his people from their sins”. Furthermore, everything happened to fulfill a prophecy predicting the virgin birth of a son who would be called “Immanuel”, meaning “God with us”. This was not just a child born under remarkable circumstances, but this was God himself, come down to deliver us from our sins.

The remarkable circumstances point us to see that Mary and Joseph here are not the principal actors. This was a work of God. Indeed, God was the one orchestrating all things and He was the one who came into the world as Jesus. Moreover, this was not the only part of God’s work. The prophecy points to a God who had been working in the world and a God who had plans for the world. Indeed, God is not absent from the happenings of this world.

In the day to day, I find it so easy to forget that God is the one whose story spans all time and all space. As individuals, we certainly all have a part to play during our time here and in the places we go, and it is important for us to do it well. However, to see with perspective, it seems that we must learn to look at our lives as part of the greater narrative that God has been and will continue to be weaving through the generations. Looking at the world this way, we can see how great our God is, who moves the nations to bring us to life again.

As we approach the Christmas season, may we remember first that Christmas celebrates the coming of Christ, that it reminds us of the wonderful news of a savior God coming to rescue us. Let us remember that Christmas is about Christ. Let us also remember that Christmas is a marker that points us to the work that God has done, is doing and will do before us, through us, and after us. This is great news for all of us! God is at work! The hopeless can find hope, the filthy can be made clean and the lost can be brought home. May this spur us on to do the work God has put before us.

God, would you open our eyes to see how all powerful and all loving you are. During Christmas, would we be reminded of just how marvelous your work here is. Would you help us to grasp how hopeless our sin has made us, so that we may rejoice even more in the salvation that Jesus came to bring. May the Holy Spirit move among us and point our hearts ever more to Jesus, who is at the center of it all.

David Hong, ’13
Read **Luke 2:8-21.** Now read it again, slower. If you are anything like me, reading the Christmas story is usually an exercise in speed-reading. Because some of us were taught the story as young children, it seems like old news. Let’s read it one more time now, as if for the very first time. God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, the one who designed nature in all its intricacy, spent all of human history up to that point setting up for this. Humanity has awaited our savior for so long it may have seemed like He was never coming, so this is the biggest of news. The One whom the prophets yearned for, the One who was perfect in character and deed, and the One who would, out of sheer love, go to the cross to bear the sin of all who would come to Him, this One had finally arrived! Further down the passage, we see two different responses to the news of the Savior. "And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:18-19). When I read this, I see a bunch of people amazed or at least intellectually astounded, and in the midst, there is Mary for whom the message seems special. When we read God's Word, let's emulate Mary, realizing that these words are the Words of the Unsearchable God who sent His only Son to die in our place and that this God loves us and wishes to have a relationship with us. As we read let's treasure the Words of the One who loves us, and, in so doing, spend the time it deserves in order to ponder its meaning and gravity. God is near, and God is love. We just need to take the time to know Him, and we know God only through His Word. I pray that we would all treasure the precious Word of God. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

*Anonymous*
As I sit in church at Christmas time, I can’t help thinking “They’re singing the wrong songs.” Don’t get me wrong; I love “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and “Joy to the World” as much as the next person, but while we are busy celebrating the birth of Christ we tend to forget his purpose. Yes Jesus was born, and yes this is cause for celebration, but let’s fast forward 33 or so years to His purpose. He came because you and I deserved death. We deserve more than death, we deserve an eternal separation from God; we deserve Hell. But instead, God chose to separate Himself from Himself, to save us. Think about that. Jesus is God, and God essentially submitted himself to be condemned to our fate by his own judgment. At Christmas, in conjunction with “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” I think we should also sing “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us.” In fact this should be sung every day so that we remember why Jesus came and just how big a thing that is.

Read the lyrics to this song as you would any other poem or verse. Then reflect and pray.

How Deep the Father – Stuart Townend

How deep the Father’s love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure

How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory

Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers

It was my sin that left Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

Stephanie Egeler, ’15
Pray for students and staff attending Urbana ’12 in St. Louis, Missouri.

Journal

How have you seen God work in your life this semester?
Pray for those who will be attending the onething conference in Kansas City.

You are kind, answered Frodo. But I do not think that any speech will help me. For I know what I should do, but I am afraid of doing it, Boromir: afraid.

Suddenly Boromir came and sat beside him. Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly? he said. I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?

I think I know already what counsel you would give, Boromir, said Frodo. And it would seem like wisdom but for the warning of my heart.


Against delay. Against the way that seems easier. Against refusal of the burden that is laid on me. Against, well, if it must be said, against trust in the strength and truth of Men.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

This is the kind of passage that makes my heart start pounding, and break out in a nervous sweat. It speaks to this fear I have of taking the easy route, and questions I have surrounding whether or not God is sovereign over the choices I make. Does He know I will go the easy way, and thus supply me with the Holy Spirit’s strength when I really need to grow in something or be broken down somehow? Or is it my choice-to listen to the comforting words of corrupt men, to cling onto whatever meager scraps of comfort I can get from people whose inevitably imperfect judgments help me coddle my sin?

Ivy Zhou, ’13
There is so much I could say about what God has been teaching me this semester, and what He has been doing. But let me just keep it simple and make a plug for prayer :) One thing that has been great this semester is knowing that people are supporting me through prayer. When my friend suggested that we start praying in the morning every day before class, I thought it was a great idea... until I had to get up every morning and actually do it. We had decided to pray every morning at 7:30 before my 8:30 classes, and when we first started, it was a serious struggle to get up. On more than one occasion during the first two weeks, I wanted to give up on it – I was too tired and too grouchy to get up to pray each morning. But I am so thankful that my friend has held me accountable in it because it has been such a huge blessing.

During our freshman year, this same friend and I tried to do a weekly accountability thing – and failed most weeks. Just the fact that we've committed ourselves to getting up early each morning to pray (even if we haven't been perfect at it) has been amazing to me because it's shown me how much we have each grown in our individual walks with God, and in our friendship with each other during the past two and a half years.

I cannot definitively prove that prayer each morning has caused this or that specific thing to happen. I cannot control for confounding variables that may have influenced how events have played out this semester. I cannot tell you if things would have been any different if we did not pray together each morning (although I think they would have been). What I can say is: it has been so good to encourage each other, to tell each other stories of what God is doing, and to keep each other accountable through prayer. And through praying with one friend, I have been more open in praying with other friends, and more bold in asking others to pray for me. We are not meant to walk through life alone, as I am often apt to do. We cannot always handle things on our own, as I am often apt to believe. God has given us a body of believers for a reason.

Lucy Yang, ’14
December 30

“For All You’ve Done (I Worship You)” by Vertical Church Band

How do I begin to tell of God's goodness? A year ago, I was at home, my heart raw from a year of the Lord pruning me and uncertain of where He would take me and whether I would even return to Duke. A long year of hating myself, feeling worthless, bitter, and lonely, condemning my every action, and distancing myself from the One who loved me had turned into a year of Him removing me from Duke, from the company of friends my age, and setting me before Him. And gently, gently, my Father spoke to my heart, rebuking me, disciplining me, and healing me.

A big part of me was reluctant to return to Duke. Duke was a place of failure and pain for me, and who likes returning to the place of their failure? I'm also not a big fan of sharing details about how incompetent I am, but my God is a God that deserves all the glory for bringing healing and restoration into my life, and He is a God that redeems. These three months of walking with Him here at Duke has culminated in a week of Him revealing to me that He is real, and He is alive and active. The months of depression that had me crying myself to sleep every night as I listened to Satan's incessant accusations of worthlessness, ugliness, and filthiness taught me to love the ones He's placed around me who, funnily enough--thanks Jesus, seem to be going through situations quite similar to the one I went through. I can honestly tell them, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. The hands of a king are the hands of a healer. Jesus has carried me through my worst storms, so surely He will carry you through yours."

Every day I am hearing testimonies of how God is moving, and He is multiplying those stories. It hasn't stopped, and it won't end here. He took my story of brokenness, weakness and pain and turned it into a story of redemption, healing, and hope. This is the God we worship, a God that takes us by our arms and heals us, who rewards growth with pruning, and who takes the little we have to offer Him and multiplies it. Isn't He beautiful?

Psalm 30

Isabella Chen, '15
An Iteration of Praises to my Father

Praise my Father, because He is a God who doesn’t give up,
Praise my Father, because He has seen me through another year—another three hundred and sixty five days that were not my own but I saw as my own,
Praise my Father, because He is a King that sits on a throne that never boasts,
Praise my Father, because He does not look for compensation,
Praise my Father, because He cradles me even when I am angry and frustrated at Him,
Praise my Father, because His unfailing love is unrequited by my little faith and finite love,
Praise my God, because He is my Father and I am His child.

I look back on this year and I see a heavenly King who had no obligation towards me and who could have, in an instant, thrown me to the depths of Hell, still cradle and love me when I was least deserving of His provision. My Father surely never gave up on me when I fell short. Oh, how many times I have been angry and so faithless because God did not see through my plans the way I wanted them to be. I saw my days this year as my own. So I praise Him for every-single-second, every-single-breath that I selfishly took as my own, but still, He did not take away.

I hope that you may see God in his almighty glory. Every day is His and His to take. Our Father who is King deserves our lives, our lives submitted solely and wholly to Him and Him alone. James 4: 13-17. I ask you to meditate on this past year, and whether you were able to submit your life, desires, and worries to God. You probably fell short, didn’t you? But He still loves and somehow graces us with life undeserved. We will not be able to see His glory in full until the day we go to Heaven, but for now, praise Him for He is our Father who loves us even though we fall short all the time.

If you have not heard Endless Hallelujah by Matt Redman, I encourage you to either look up the lyrics or intently listen to the lyrics. To me, this is a song of praise and worship for our enduring Father and King.

Vivian Tsang, '14
Pray for those attending Passion 2013 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Journal

What one thing do you most regret about last year, and what will you do about it this year?

What's the most important way you will, by God's grace, try to make this year different from last year?

In what area of your life do you most need change, and what will you do about it this year?
The Vision

So this guy comes up to me and says "What's the vision? What's the big idea?" I open my mouth and words come out like this...The vision?

The vision is JESUS – obsessively, dangerously, undeniably Jesus.

The vision is an army of young people.

You see bones? I see an army. And they are FREE from materialism.

They laugh at 9-5 little prisons. They could eat caviar on Monday and crusts on Tuesday. They wouldn't even notice. They know the meaning of the Matrix, the way the West was won. They are mobile like the wind, they belong to the nations. They need no passport. People write their addresses in pencil and wonder at their strange existence. They are free yet they are slaves of the hurting and dirty and dying. What is the vision? The vision is holiness that hurts the eyes. It makes children laugh and adults angry. It gave up the game of minimum integrity long ago to reach for the stars. It scorns the good and strains for the best. It is dangerously pure.

Light flickers from every secret motive, every private conversation. It loves people away from their suicide leaps, their Satan games. This is an army that will lay down its life for the cause. A million times a day its soldiers choose to lose that they might one day win the great 'Well done' of faithful sons and daughters.

Such heroes are as radical on Monday morning as Sunday night. They don't need fame from names. Instead they grin quietly upwards and hear the crowds chanting again and again: "COME ON!"

And this is the sound of the underground The whisper of history in the making Foundations shaking Revolutionaries dreaming once again Mystery is scheming in whispers Conspiracy is breathing... This is the sound of the underground.

And the army is discipl(in)ed.

Young people who beat their bodies into submission.

Every soldier would take a bullet for his comrade at arms. The tattoo on their back boasts "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain".
Sacrifice fuels the fire of victory in their upward eyes. Winners. Martyrs. Who can stop them? Can hormones hold them back? Can failure succeed? Can fear scare them or death kill them?

And the generation prays


Whatever it takes they will give: Breaking the rules. Shaking mediocrity from its cosy little hide. Laying down their rights and their precious little wrongs, laughing at labels, fasting essentials. The advertisers cannot mould them. Hollywood cannot hold them. Peer-pressure is powerless to shake their resolve at late night parties before the cockerel cries.

They are incredibly cool, dangerously attractive

inside.

On the outside? They hardly care. They wear clothes like costumes to communicate and celebrate but never to hide. Would they surrender their image or their popularity? They would lay down their very lives - swap seats with the man on death row - guilty as hell. A throne for an electric chair.

With blood and sweat and many tears, with sleepless nights and fruitless days,

they pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on them.

Their DNA chooses JESUS. (He breathes out, they breathe in.) Their subconscious sings. They had a blood transfusion with Jesus. Their words make demons scream in shopping centres. Don’t you hear them coming? Herald the weirdos! Summon the losers and the freaks. Here come the frightened and forgotten with fire in their eyes. They walk tall and trees applaud, skyscrapers bow, mountains are dwarfed by these children of another dimension. Their prayers summon the hounds of heaven and invoke the ancient dream of Eden.

And this vision will be. It will come to pass; it will come easily; it will come soon. How do I know? Because this is the longing of creation itself, the groaning of the Spirit, the very dream of God. My tomorrow is his today. My distant hope is his 3D. And my feeble, whispered, faithless prayer invokes a thunderous, resounding, bone-shaking great ‘Amen!’ from countless angels, from heros of the faith, from Christ himself. And he is the original dreamer, the ultimate winner.
Guaranteed.

*Pete Greig, author of Red Moon Rising*
What Changed

(This is a piece of spoken word that I wrote earlier this year, trying to wrap my mind what knowing God means).

When you meet your past self
The one who knew God like a child knows her father
At the apex of his smile
You wonder what changed
What got between the clash of cynicism and mysticism that made you lose track of Him
How one day hymns could turn into curses you don't dare to utter
Lest God himself will hear them
Worship shows become empty stages
Raised palms are useless for someone who faces
Away
For those days when God doesn’t seem so close
And heaven and hell meet somewhere on 9th and Broad Street
In a silence filled with so much absence that it’s deafening
You wonder what changed
Was it the voice of demons muffled so well as the ringing of chorus
The idea of a personal God, Emmanuel for us
For me
That changed everything
Cold winter nights full of security and warmth have evolved into hugging yourself to keep warm enough to brave the chill
And children laugh and dance and see parents as immortals
But once the world hits they realize there is more for them
To suffer like He does is out of the question
Although the Holy Spirit and hell both seem to manifest themselves in fire
So we burn
Wearing wedding gowns at the funeral pyre
Forever immaculate bride and ash
Taking steps slowly but moving far too fast
Into the embrace of eternity
The crayon art of children is beautiful to say the least
But did you notice they never include shadows
As the mind recognizes dimension we see more dim
More of the dark and light and in between that no one knows
So what does it even mean to say you know Him?
To know God
So perhaps this journey of 18 years young has just begun
And after all my years it will finally be enough
To figure out I know Him in that I won’t ever know Him
Until the very end

This year has been challenging in a different way than usual. It hasn’t been because of particularly strenuous circumstances, unfortunate events, or conventional struggles, but because I have had to completely reevaluate what I truly believe in, discerning my personal convictions against what my surroundings, community, and culture say. It is frustrating for me, to say the least, when I have gone from knowing Something, Someone, as so true, to a place of wondering where that certainty and past-self went. But in the questions and doubt and perceived absence, I know there is still a promise. Like it says in Philippians, God, who has started a good work in us, will demonstrate faithfulness and bring it to completion.

Philippians 1:6-8
6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

In the course of a year, many things can change, and many will. But the sacrifice, the fidelity, the affection that God gives us is and will be eternal. Giving up is the easiest thing a lot of times, especially as the year rolls around with troubles unseen and lazy spells, but there is still the reminder that God is here and He sustains us; that God never gives up on us. So before we are swallowed in the commitments and leisure and shackles and freedoms the New Year brings, let us take time to appreciate God. Let us remember that He has not forgotten us. Let us live like we know we have a Father who loves us, who will finish everything He starts. Our Lord has given us another year, so that He might grow us in the soil of solidarity and have us bear fruits of the Spirit, and He will stay faithful, to us, for us. Sometimes, I don't know what faith is, just that God provides it.

Amy Wang, '16
Does “helping” always “help”?  

I know I’m treading in dangerous territory here. But seriously . . . does it?

And what is it we mean by “helping,” anyways? Is that “the point” of service? But if it’s not, then what is? If our motives “aren’t right” should we even serve at all? What does Duke have to say on the matter? America? Jesus?

Let me start by saying that if, as you’re reading from here on out, you expect to “find some answers,” you may want to go pick up one of those nifty “self-help” books or go watch some Oprah, or something. I’m not in the business of giving answers (mostly because I don’t have all that many). I’ve just got a whole lot of questions. Hopefully they’ll be helpful – er . . . actually, why don’t you just keep reading, and we’ll go from there.

So, I’ve been thinking about questions surrounding methods, implications, and significance of service for a while now, stemming from working with a social enterprise in Sierra Leone to developing a primary school in India to my current service and research at a refugee resettlement organization within Durham. In my recent involvement within Durham, at an organization called WRD, I’ve had a chance to talk with some of the other people who volunteer there, and try and understand why it is that they serve. In doing so, I’ve gotten answers like:

“Especially as Christians, I don’t feel like it should be about us ‘feeling good’ but . . .”
“I want to share the Gospel . . . it’s eternal matters, you know?”
“Building friendships, relationships.”
“Meeting their physical and spiritual needs.”
“Just hearing their stories. . . . it’s amazing.”

All heartfelt, all well-intentioned. Yes!

But even the best-intentioned things can go awry. And so the qualms that I have with these sorts of answers are the same sorts of qualms that I have with short-term missions and service, non-local aid organizations in general: although the intentions are benevolent, and often good, what impact do they create? And how does the way in which we pursue them affect that? And who gets to determine whether what happens is “good” or not?

Okay, so we need to check our motives. And we also need to check our methods. But I don’t mean to ask these questions to immobilize us—because at some point self-examination becomes narcissistic navel-gazing, and that helps no one—because we also need to consider the common trope, “what really matters?”

Dean Wells, in the first chapter of his book titled Living Without Enemies, addresses this issue well, saying:

*My hypothesis is that our operational assumption has long been that the central problem of human existence is mortality. From the moment we come into the world, our fundamental crisis is that we’re going to die . . . But here’s my argument. What if it turned out that the fundamental human problem wasn’t mortality after all? What if it turned out that all along the fundamental human problem was*
isolation? ... If the fundamental human problem is isolation, then the solutions we're looking for don't lie in the laboratory or the hospital or the frontiers of human knowledge or experience. Instead the solutions lie in things we already have—most of all, in one another.

But our capacity to invest in one another is limited—how many people can we realistically, intentionally, deeply invest in over a sustained period of time? The number is truly, very small. As a mentor pointed out to me once, Jesus only had 12 people (his "friends") whom he lead, three of whom were his "close" followers/friends and only one of whom that he called his "beloved" (John). And so, if Jesus, as a person, only led three people intimately (although he influenced many others), there could be something that that we have to learn from him about the scope of what we can do. This presents a problem if we're looking for quantified results for validation, because, as one of my professors once said when describing this sort of service, "no one gets a Nobel Peace Prize for investing in the long-term into the lives of two or three people."

The first thing that comes to mind as I’m thinking about this is in Luke 5, when some friends of a paralyzed man want to get him to Jesus so he can be healed. But, when they take them to the house Jesus is healing people in, there is such a huge crowd there that they can’t get in the door. So, they climb to the roof and dig a hole in the roof large enough to lower the man down into the house. But then, Jesus does the weirdest thing. He looks at the man and his friends, and seeing their faith, he says to the paralyzed man, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” (v. 20)

Can you image the awkward silence that followed that?

The friends must have been thinking something along the lines of, “What the crap. We just dug through a roof for this fellow, and all you have to tell him is that his sins are forgiven?! Where's the healing?!”

Jesus eventually does go on to heal the man, telling the people, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” (v.23-26)

From the outside, it just looks like Jesus was making an unnecessary scene of the situation. I mean, the man eventually got healed, and everyone went home happy. So what was the deal with the whole "sins" bit? I think the religious people, who knew their stuff, and whom when Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven, were ticked off, have some insight to offer. They exclaimed, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” they were right. Only God could forgive sins. And also only when sins were forgiven could people have the opportunity to be in a relationship with God.

That was the bit that got me, when I realized it—the relationship. Jesus was making a way for the man to be in relationship with an all-loving, good God for the rest of eternity. And He did it first.
This isn’t supposed to be a comment on the way that we should help people in need—of course we need to look out for the immediate needs of those we’re seeking to care for. And we also need to consider the way in which Jesus prioritized the relationship with this man, and let that shape our understanding of what “helping” looks like. This isn’t something that is meant to be implemented on a global scale—if you notice, Jesus was just helping one person.

Jesus could have sent the man away having just healed him and nothing more. But he didn’t. He valued the man being able to be with him, first. And so, when I think of a highly competitive place like Duke, where what is valued is someone who can work efficiently, alone, all the way to the top, I wonder if we don’t have something to learn here.

Also looking to my time volunteering at WRD, and the principles that they have of ensuring community and intentional friendships with the refugees that they bring into the United States, I can begin to appreciate a bit more what they want to do. They have teams called “good neighbor” teams, whose only responsibility is to stop by and say hello and spend time getting to know the families; to build community with them. But is that valuable? Is it “helpful? I guess that depends on what we mean by valuable, or upon what parameter we define “helpful.”

Because these are only true if we are operating under an assumption that defines the fundamental parameter for success as more than delaying mortality, and instead expands it to eliminating isolation before that end. But it is when the assumption of solidarity and community is more important than service and outcomes, that one can claim that simply not abandoning others may be kinder than seeking to fix them. So, we look forward to this upcoming year, as we seek to love and serve, let’s think about that, and let it shape the way that we do.

Rachel White, ’14
John 14:12

…I say to you, he who believes in Me, …greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father

Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the greater work. Yet we think of prayer as some commonsense exercise of our higher powers that simply prepares us for God’s work. In the teachings of Jesus Christ, prayer is the working of the miracle of redemption in me, which produces the miracle of redemption in others, through the power of God. The way fruit remains firm is through prayer, but remember that it is prayer based on the agony of Christ in redemption, not on my own agony. We must go to God as His child, because only a child gets his prayers answered; a “wise” man does not (see Matthew 11:25).

Prayer is the battle, and it makes no difference where you are. However God may engineer your circumstances, your duty is to pray. Never allow yourself this thought, “I am of no use where I am,” because you certainly cannot be used where you have not yet been placed. Wherever God has placed you and whatever your circumstances, you should pray, continually offering up prayers to Him. And He promises, “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do…” (John 14:13). Yet we refuse to pray unless it thrills or excites us, which is the most intense form of spiritual selfishness. We must learn to work according to God’s direction, and He says to pray. “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

There is nothing thrilling about a laboring person’s work, but it is the laboring person who makes the ideas of the genius possible. And it is the laboring saint who makes the ideas of his Master possible. When you labor at prayer, from God’s perspective there are always results. What an astonishment it will be to see, once the veil is finally lifted, all the souls that have been reaped by you, simply because you have been in the habit of taking your orders from Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest
New Year's resolutions. Sometimes we over think it. God has given us so many capabilities and abilities. Just do it. Cross off those bucket list items. Talk to that one person. Dare yourself. And if we do it to glorify God, He will respond. Maybe not in ways we want, but in ways that will work out in the end. Learn from the bad, always look for the good. And thank God every day for giving you a new day.

*Philip Me, ’14*
Who is God again?

More often than not, when I look at God, I don’t see the God of the Bible. I see someone much weaker, and I’m clearly wrong. I struggle with believing most of what God says, even as a Christian. Therefore, I don’t often pray with confidence because part of me doesn’t believe He can or will answer. In my finite mental capacity, it’s easy to look at the world around me and proclaim “where could God possibly be?” By no means could I explain the mechanics of how God does what He does, and no one can, but what I do know, what we know is what God has revealed about Himself. Pride and unbelief rise when we forget who God is. Let us remind ourselves who our God is. In His great power, He created the world and all in it. In His justice He condemns sin, and in His love, He died a sinner’s death to save us and to make us, who rightly deserve condemnation, heirs of this great God! Here are some verses to remind us of who our God really is.

Job 37:13-15, 38:4-7; Psalm 100:1-5; Ephesians 2:1-10

The New Year often draws us to plan to do, to correct ourselves and be better. There’s nothing wrong with that, but let’s just revel in who our God is. Let’s spend less time trying to do this year and spend more time worshipping and being with God. By no means is this a call to be lazy, but like the Word says “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” as well as “the joy of the Lord is our strength.” If we seek Him, not only will He give us the strength to do what He wills us to do, but we will do it with joy, because joy only comes from knowing who God is and knowing who you are as a Christian to God through Christ.

Father God, forgive us for our shortsightedness. Thank you for your Word that gently reminds us of how great you really are, how undeserving we are, and how gracious you are to us. I pray in the most glorious and praiseworthy name of Jesus. Amen.

Anonymous
The Pride of Busyness

“How have you been recently?”

“Oh, I'm not too bad. I'm taking a few classes, working two jobs, volunteering at church and on the side I'm writing a novel. I hardly sleep and practically live on coffee, but it's great. What have you been up to?”

“Me? Just work I guess.”

“That must be nice.” [thinks: slacker]

Have you ever had that conversation? I have many times, and over the years I have found myself playing both roles.

We take this sort of talk for granted, but if we step back and get a bit of perspective, it is a fascinating social construct with massive—and frightening—implications.

Those short conversations give us a glimpse of the way people view the world, because it is often the little day to day practices that reveal our deepest values.

You can see it play out every Monday at the office, and every Sunday in church lobbies around the world. People who have not seen each other in a few days or weeks start to catch up, and the talk quickly turns toward comparing notes on how terribly busy we all are. Volunteer positions, family commitments and work loads are listed, as each of us demonstrates just how much we are trying to juggle.

The sad thing is, we are quite proud of it.

And not very secretly proud either.

Oh sure, we complain about how we have not had a real day off in weeks, or how much work it all is. But somehow all our complaining sounds rather like bragging. It's just backhanded bragging, like complaining that you didn’t expect learning Spanish to be so much work after you had such high scores in French, German and fifth-century Latin.
You can hear it in the voices of those recounting their busy schedules, and the guilt with which many of us have learned to speak of having free time. We've bought into the gospel of busyness. We've accepted the narrative we are constantly sold by our society—that our value rests in what we can produce, that we are loved for what we can accomplish. Full calendars become a badge of honor.

Lee, a pastor I knew quite well, was a perfect example. The only pastor at a small rural church, he worked constantly. In his mind, the success or failure of the church was on his shoulders, completely dependent on his level of activity. Between studying, hospital visits, preaching and leading worship on Sunday, teaching a few additional times each week and being constantly on call for everyone in his church, he hardly had a free moment all week. And you could tell. He was chronically tired and often dealt with long periods of discouragement. But he loved his church, he wanted to do right by them and the only way he could see to be a "successful" pastor was to work even harder despite his declining physical and emotional health. Because to Lee, like so many of us, work had become the way he measured his value.

So we push ourselves harder and harder. We sleep less, we work more and we do indeed accomplish a great deal.

But in the process we begin to forget how to sit, and think, and breathe, and pray, and read for pleasure, and have a real conversation with a friend, or family member or spouse and savor a drink for its flavors and complexities, not its ability to chemically induce either wakefulness or sleep.

Here's the dirty little secret of the gospel of busyness: It promises us a full and satisfying life, but, in the end, it makes our lives emptier. It uses us for what we can contribute, and in the process we live less, feel less, even love less.

Instead of a life filled with the satisfaction of endless accomplishments, we've gotten ourselves a generation of chronic exhaustion, absent workaholic parents and kids who have been not-so-subtly taught that the only way to earn the attention and love of others is with grades, paychecks or championships.

But your value is not determined by what you produce. Your loveliness is not based on what you accomplish or how full your calendar is.

Work is good—it's part of the way God designed His image-bearers—but it is not the only thing we were made for. He created us to have a balance in life, going so far as to incorporate a cycle of work and rest into the very fabric of the created order. There is a time for work in that cycle, but there is also a time for rest and community and quiet contemplation.
A life of constant overcommitment is not a sign of success, or something to be bragged about. It is a sign of imbalance, a sign we have put our faith in the gospel of busyness instead of in a God who dares us to trust Him and be willing to rest.

There is hope for the overcommitted, though; we don’t have to live this way. We can balance good hard work with rest and play; in fact we were created to live in that balance. And the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can all stop playing the game of bragging that we are so very busy.

So the next time you catch up with a friend, refrain from contributing to the cycle. Refuse to brag about busyness as if it were a virtue, refuse to act like making time to rest is a mark of shame. If the very God who designed us thought that balancing work with rest was worthwhile, perhaps we should give it a try.

*Mason Slater, www.relevantmagazine.com*