

Exam Focus

Short devotions for busy students



Reminder

Spend time with God

Close

Got it

20 Devotions to focus your mind on God's word
in the midst of a busy exam season

BOOK
REPORT



Exam Focus

Short devotions for busy students

Even during Exams...

1. God is good
2. God is with you
3. God is in control
4. We can worship
5. God comes first
6. We can honor God
7. You can rest
8. Your need friends
9. We can enjoy God's gifts
10. God cares
11. You can avoid temptation
12. You can be a witness
13. Your future is certain
14. Your identity is in Christ
15. God's word can be trusted
16. Church is vital
17. We can pray in confidence
18. We should avoid laziness
19. We can know peace
20. We can look forward

Even during Exams...

God is good



Day 1



Psalm 34:1-8

I don't watch a lot of TV. However, if I do find myself scrolling through Netflix, it is usually in search of some sort of crime drama. As the plot unfolds in shows like these, we find ourselves continually asking the question 'which characters can I trust?' Usually, we discover there is someone who, in the early episodes, seemed like one of the good guys. Yet, in reality, as time passes and circumstances develop, we discover they aren't quite as 'good' as we originally thought. Time and circumstances have exposed them.

The Bible says there is only one individual who can be described as completely good. In fact, Jesus himself says to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:18, 'no one is good except God alone.' However, perhaps you are inclined to view God like some of the characters in these TV dramas. Maybe God seemed good to you in years gone by, but now as time and circumstances have changed, you're not so sure.

Maybe the pressure of exam season makes you wonder if God really has your best interests at heart? Perhaps seeing the person in your class who cheated in their assignment get a top grade prompts you to question whether or not God cares about what is good?

Yet, notice how the Psalmist declares that, in spite of changing circumstances, God is good (v8). It appears that this Psalmist has been through some tough times. He describes his feelings of fear (v4). He speaks of being a 'poor man' with great 'trouble' (v6). However, in spite of this, the Psalmist concludes that the Lord is still good.

This isn't some abstract, theoretical goodness. In fact it is a goodness that can be experienced and delighted in by those who trust in him. Verse 8 says 'Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!'

In this exam season, perhaps you can relate to this Psalmist. Do you feel fearful? Are you troubled? Cling to the God who is good. Like the Psalmist, look to him until your heart sings.

Even during Exams...

God is with you



Day 2



John 14:16-17

Do you have any irrational fears? Maybe it's spiders? Heights? The dentist? My irrational fear is flying. My least favourite thing about going on holiday is the inevitable flight to and from whatever country I am visiting. Why do I not like flying? It's not that I'm afraid of heights or just loathe awkward conversations with the stranger beside me (although I'm not a fan of that either). The main reason I am afraid of flying is because, to me, it just doesn't feel that safe.

The reality is, of course, that flying is factually the most safe form of public transport we have. In fact, the odds of me being in a plane crash are said to be 1 in 11 million. I am statistically far more likely to be struck by lightning than I am to die from a plane crash. Yet, for some reason, getting struck by lightning is not something that ever enters my consciousness.

You would think that all of this information would eradicate my fears of flying. Yet that doesn't seem to be the case.. Sometimes logical arguments aren't enough to calm us of our fears. We need something greater. Thankfully, God does offer us something greater - his presence.

Do you ever notice the progression of God's proximity to his people throughout the Bible? He dwells with them in a movable tent in the days of Moses (the tabernacle). This progresses to a permanent place of dwelling in the temple under Solomon. Yet, under the glorious new covenant when Christ has come, God gives us something even better. In John 14:16-17 Jesus describes a helper who will be with God's people forever. Who is this helper? God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit which came down at Pentecost now indwells the lives of all God's people.

At any and every moment, God is now with his people. Why? Because he dwells in them. One of the most common promises God gives his people throughout the Bible is this - I am with you.

Here's how Adam Ramsey puts it in his great book, Truth on Fire:

"When children get scared at night, a good father doesn't yell, 'knock it off, just be brave!' Instead they walk into the room and remind them, 'you don't need to be afraid. I'm right here'"

At 1am in your late night study session - God is with you

When you're about to turn the page in the exam hall - God is with you

When you receive the envelope which contains your results in a few months - God is with you

Why?

Because for the rest of your existence, God has promised, 'I will be with you.'

Even during Exams...

God is in control



Day 3



Romans 8:28

Have you ever played chess before? It's not a game that I would consider myself very good at. The key to being a good chess player is the ability to anticipate what the opponent is going to do next. Unfortunately for me, I'm not so good at thinking that far ahead. As a result, instead of making the right moves that I think will restrict my opponents future ability to beat me, I always find myself just reacting to their latest move. Inevitably, this results in me losing the game.

My chess tactics really serve as a picture of what we as humans, more generally, are like. We are reactive beings. Yes we make our plans for the future, but there are any number of things outside of our control which can squash our plans in an instant.

- You book your holiday two years in advance, but then the airline cancels your flight 24 hours before it is due to go
- You study and prepare for an exam in the best possible way, studying all the past papers. But then the examiner randomly changes things up for the first time in years
- You make a plan for retirement which is decades in the making with pensions and investment ISA's, but then you get sick and don't get to enjoy the fruit of your labor.

We are reactive beings. We are always subject to external circumstances outside our control. Here's the good news, however. God is not reactive. God is never caught off guard. God is never surprised by the things that we are surprised by. And it's not just that God is able to somehow see the future and so he can anticipate these things coming. NO - God in a very real sense controls the future. He ultimately dictates what can and can not happen.

If you are someone who has set themselves in opposition to God, that is pretty scary news. However, if you are a Christian that is good news for you - especially in exam season where we always feel pressure because we think that how we perform is going to 'dictate our destiny.'

Take comfort in the knowledge that your exam results, regardless of how good or bad they end up, will not somehow cause you to ruin God's plans for your life. You are not that powerful. So, as a Christian student, what should you do? Work hard (making the most of the gifts and abilities God has given you), relax (knowing that God is the one who is ultimately in control) and trust (believing that God will continue to lead you in his perfect ways).

Even during Exams...

You can worship



Day 4



Psalm 42

A funeral is not an event that we particularly want to have scheduled into our diary. Our presence at a funeral usually means that someone we know and love has sadly passed away. We will never get to speak to that particular person or hear from them ever again. As a consequence, funerals are always somber occasions.

However, have you ever been to a funeral where, in the midst of the sorrow, there is an expectant hope? This is often the case when the individual who has passed away was a Christian. While these types of funerals are still marked by a profound sense of mourning and loss, there also exists a tangible sense of peace. Family members pick songs and hymns which contain lyrics of God's goodness. Close friends pray publicly by offering God their thanks for his grace and kindness.

To some, this might seem odd. How can there be any sense of hope or joy at a funeral? But the reality of the Christian life is that, with God, there is always hope. With God, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in, he is worthy of our worship.

In Psalm 42 we read the words of an individual for whom worshipping God might not seem like it should be their natural reaction. Just as it seems counterintuitive to worship at a funeral, it would seem counterintuitive for this Psalmist to worship while 'tears have been his food' (v3), 'his soul is downcast' (v5), his enemy is 'oppressing him' (v9) and his life is in 'turmoil' (v11). However, worshipping God is exactly what this Psalmist chooses to do.

Notice the numerous times this Psalmist commands his own heart to 'hope in God' (v5, v11). Life might not be easy. This Psalmist might feel emotionally unstable. Yet he recognises the seemingly counterintuitive response God's people can have in the face of difficulty - one of worship and thankfulness. Indeed, this is where the Psalmist lands at the end of the chapter. He says in verse 11, 'For I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.'

Perhaps you are in a phase of life where worshipping God seems counterintuitive. Right now, there are perhaps countless reasons to be panicking, anxious, stressed and concerned. Sure, you might not be facing an upcoming funeral (although exam season often feels like death to your social life), but this time of year can be hard for a whole host of reasons.

Why not, like the Psalmist, continue to speak honestly to God about your struggles? Why not, like the Psalmist, preach to your own heart, demanding it to 'hope in God' until you, like the Psalmist, find yourself 'praising him again.'

Even during Exams...

God comes first



Day 5



Mark 1:35-39

Have you ever noticed that some people consider busyness to be a badge of honor? When you simply ask them 'how are things?' they eagerly reply by saying 'I am so, so busy.' Perhaps we have been guilty of this mindset ourselves? There is almost a sense of achievement when communicating how busy we are to others. It makes us feel like the sort of people who are in demand, or are making a difference in the world.

The Bible doesn't seem to consider busyness as a badge of honor. In fact, you might recall the well known story of Luke 10:38-42 where Martha is rebuked by Jesus for being a busybody. Yes, there were things to do, meals to cook and guests to host; but her priority ought to have been, like Mary, spending time with Jesus.

In Mark 1:35-39 we see how Jesus practiced what he preached. The events of v35 describe the morning after an extremely busy day in Jesus' life. Notice how, the day before, Jesus: Traveled to Capernaum (v21), taught in the synagogue (v21), cast a demon out of a man (v25), visited the house of Simon and Andrew (v29), healed Simon Peter's mother of a fever (v31), and healed multitudes of other people from sickness and demon possession (v33)

To put it bluntly, Jesus has just had a busy day. Yet, the crazy thing is, as he wakes up the next morning in v35, there is still far more work to be done. The disciples look for Jesus (who would understandably be exhausted at this point), so that he might heal more people and satisfy the incessant desires of the crowd.

But where was Jesus? He had removed himself from the busyness of activity to spend time in prayer with his heavenly father. Jesus didn't allow busyness to distract him from what was most important. He understood his need to continually focus his eyes and heart on God the Father before he thought about filling his diary with things to do.

While Jesus is primarily our Saviour, in a secondary sense he also serves as our example. As you face a busy day, ask yourself this question - If Jesus, the son of God in whom full deity dwells, needed time to remove himself from the busyness of life to spend time in prayer; how much more do we, sinful and weak human beings, need to do the same? Today, don't put spending time with God as item number 30 on your to do list. Rather, recognise your need for him as a means of fulfilling all your other tasks in a way that honors him.

Even during Exams...

You can honor God



Day 6



Romans 12:1-2

1 Cor 10:31

Have you ever played the word association game? Here are the rules: As soon as I say a word, you must say another word that immediately comes to your mind. So, for example, when I say the word 'tasty', you might reply with the word 'chocolate.' Or, if I say the word 'home' you might say 'Belfast.'

However, if we were to play the word association game and I started by saying the word 'worship' - what word immediately comes to your mind? You might think of the word 'church' or 'singing.' Indeed, these are good words and are, most definitely, related to the concept of worship. It is unlikely, however, that words such as 'studying' or 'exams' would pop into your mind.

However, according to the apostle Paul in Romans 12:1-2, proper worship is offering our whole bodies (or entire lives) to God. The life of worship is one which surrenders everything to the Lordship and rule of King Jesus. Of course, the Bible reserves special instruction for what our corporate worship should look like (preaching of the word, singing of spiritual songs, participation in church ordinances etc), but in a more general sense as individuals, our entire lives are to be marked by worship.

This is why Paul says to the Corinthians that even tasks as basic as eating and drinking can be done with a heart of worship. They can be fulfilled in a manner that honors the Lord. Could it be, then, that we can even complete tasks as mundane as 'studying for exams' in a way that honors the Lord? Of course.

- It honors God when we study diligently, making the most of the abilities he has blessed us with.
- It honors God when we take time out of our busy study sessions in order to help our classmate who is struggling to understand a particular topic.
- It honors God when we resist the urge to look at our neighbour's paper in the exam room, even when you could quite easily see some of the answers they have written.

What could possibly motivate a Christian student to live that way? Well, Paul gives us the answer at the start of our passage in Romans 12. It is 'in view of God's mercy' that we are motivated to live in such a sacrificial manner.

Do you have a big view of God's mercy today? Have you thought about the kindness Jesus has shown you in the gospel? If so, what does it look like for you, in response, to journey through this exam season in a manner that honors him?

Even during Exams...

You should rest



Day 7



Genesis 2:7
Psalm 90

If your social media feed looks anything like mine, it will be full of self empowering quotes and inspirational messages. People love to share 'feel good' statements like 'you are enough' or 'you are worthy.' Indeed, you can understand why. Who doesn't love to hear a message that inflates our feelings of self worth?

However, the Bible gives us another word which we can use to fill in the blank of the sentence 'you are ____.' Although, I should warn you, this word is unlikely to get many shares and likes on Instagram or TikTok. When God creates man in Genesis, he does so from the ground. In that sense, the author of Genesis and Psalm 90 might be inclined to fill in the blank by saying 'you are dust.'

Genesis 2:7 says ..."the Lord formed the man of dust from the ground."

Psalm 90:3 says, "You turn people back to dust saying, 'return to dust you mortals'"

You are.. dust.

This is the repeated reminder that Christopher Ash gives us in his really helpful book entitled 'Zeal Without Burnout.' Yes, it is true that we each have different capacities. Some of you may be able to operate well with less sleep and longer hours of work than others. However, at the end of the day, we are all dust. We are not God. Every single one of us needs time to recuperate and relax. We need rest.

Resting doesn't simply mean sleeping. In fact, experts suggest there are around 6 different types of rest that are important for you and I. These include physical rest (sleeping), mental rest, social rest (spend time with friends and family), sensory rest (come off screens) and creative rest (take a walk / hike and enjoy creation). We could add, of course, spiritual rest. A time where we heighten our focus on God's word and prayer.

Everyone's rhythms of rest will be different and, let's be honest, exam season can be a very difficult time to get the rest you need. But let's remember that, at the end of the day, we are dust. We are finite beings and God created us to rest. Why not make a schedule of how you will incorporate rest into this busy exam season, acknowledging that you are not God; rather, you are dust.

Even during Exams...

You need friendship



Day 8



Ecc 4:9-12

Our world is obsessed with romantic relationships. They are the theme of many Hollywood films, the subject of many news columns and, if we're honest, the topic of conversation young people find themselves discussing more than anything else. Quite ironically, however, while our culture idolizes romantic relationships, we greatly undermine the importance of friendship.

Indeed, even as Christians we find ourselves emphasizing romantic relationships over and above friendships. This is probably further evidenced by the fact that today's passage, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, is often read at weddings when, in fact, it has little to do with the relationship between a husband and a wife. Even as Christians we find ourselves diluting the importance and intimacy of friendship.

With friends, according to the author of Ecclesiastes, there is safety. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for friend is closely related to the Hebrew word for secret. In other words, a friend is someone who is so 'safe' that we trust them with the things about us that we hide from the other people in our lives.

Exam season brings with it a host of unique challenges. We feel fear of failure, worry about the future and general fatigue with the sheer volume of tasks needing completed. It is a time when our friends become so important - especially our Christian friends. They can provide us with godly counsel (Prov 27:9) and even rebuke us when needed (Prov 27:6).

This month, don't be tempted to distance yourself from your friends. Rather, think how you can be a particular help to each other in the midst of this exam season. Why not consider some of the following:

- Commit to praying for each other each day
- Send regular verses of encouragement to each other
- Be honest with each other about your worries, stresses and fears in exam season
- Commit to meeting up at least once per week just to have fun and forget about the stress of exams for a few hours

Even during Exams...

You can enjoy God's gifts



Day 9



Ecc 11:1 - 12:1

Back when I was a University student (in the year 2012 to be precise), there was a word that became very popular on the internet. The word was 'YOLO'. The word YOLO served as an acronym for the phrase 'you only live once.' I have no idea who or how the 'YOLO' trend started. However, it was meant to be a means of encouraging everyone to make the most of the short life they had here on earth.

In some ways, the message of Ecclesiastes 11 is 'YOLO.' The author of Ecclesiastes is encouraging his readers to live life to the fullest. Given that life is brief, we ought to live without fear (v1-6) and with great joy (v7-10). In particular, the author has young people in mind when he says these things. Why? Because as he alludes to in chapter 12, life is short. One day you will be old. Your eyesight will get worse (12:2). Your hearing will deteriorate (12:3). Your teeth will get weaker (12:4).

In light of this, make the most of your youth and enjoy life.

God has given us a world filled with many great things to enjoy. Friendship, sport, music, drama, entertainment and food - just to name a few. These are what theologians sometimes call acts of 'common grace.' While God has been particularly gracious to us as Christians in saving us from the penalty of our sin, he has also been extremely gracious to all of humanity in a more general sense by giving us a world full of glorious gifts to enjoy. As odd as this may sound to you, we have a responsibility as Christians to actively enjoy the world God has placed us in.

Of course, the author of Ecclesiastes is not issuing a blanket statement of 'live however you like.' The Bible is also clear that, in our sinful world, many people have distorted these gifts for sinful purposes (for example, not all entertainment is to be celebrated or enjoyed by God's people). That's why the author gives us the clarification of 12:1 - 'Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth..'

Yes, enjoy life. Yes, make the most of the good gifts given to us. However, as you do these things, be acutely aware that one day you will give an account to the God who made you.

I always found that, for some reason, exam season gave me a fresh appreciation for the simple things God has given us to enjoy in this life. Today, why don't you take the time to thank God for his acts of common grace. Ask that he would enable you to enjoy them as an act of worship to him.

Even during Exams...

God cares



Day 10



Matt 6:25-26

If you were stranded on a desert island, what 3 items would you take with you? This is a question that, no doubt, you have been asked about 100 times over your lifetime.

Why is this such a popular question? Perhaps because it is so telling. It lets people know what things are most important to you. And we can tell a lot about a person by analyzing what it is they hold most dear.

Do you ever wonder what is most important to God? What does he treasure? What does he deem important? There are many different answers that the Bible gives us.

However, one thing that God considers extremely valuable is you.

In Matthew 6 Jesus purposely demonstrates how valuable you are to him by making a contrast with the birds in the sky. He draws our attention to 2 truths about birds.

Firstly, they aren't that important. In Matthew 10:29 Jesus even says that you could sell two sparrows for a penny. Birds aren't considered that valuable. However, in spite of this, the second truth Jesus teaches us about birds is that God, our heavenly father, cares for them. Notice how the birds don't need to worry about sowing or reaping yet God feeds them.

You might be thinking, why on earth is Jesus talking so much about birds?' Well, the answer is to contrast them with you. Here's the point Jesus is making - if God cares so much about the birds and they aren't even all that valuable, how much more does

God care for you who is of great value?! Birds like sparrows can be sold for half a penny, yet you are an image bearer of God. Your life has immeasurable value. Jesus draws our attention to the birds because, by doing so, he is reminding us just how much God cares for people like you.

Do you ever doubt whether or not God cares for you? Maybe you've just had a real stinker of an exam. Perhaps you're doubting whether or not you're going to get the grades to do what you really want for next year. In all of these difficult circumstances, it can be very easy to ask the question, 'does God even care?' You bet he does. In fact, the birds that fly overhead are testament to the fact that God cares deeply about you.

You are seriously valuable to him.

Even during Exams...

You can avoid temptation



Day 11



Matt 26:41

You have, perhaps, seen a YouTube video entitled 'the marshmallow test.' It's an experiment played with kids whereby a parent sets their child on a chair with a marshmallow placed on the table in front of them. The parent then leaves the room with one instruction for the child - 'do not eat the marshmallow until I am back.' If the child is successful in withstanding the temptation, they will be allowed to eat two marshmallows upon their parents return.

It's a very funny video. It's hard not to laugh as you watch the desperate longings in each of the children's faces as they stare at the marshmallow, intensely trying not to grab it and shove it in their mouths. For most of the children in the experiment, however, the temptation is too much.

By the time the parent returns, the marshmallow is gone and there is a look of guilt on their child's face.

You can probably relate to the children in that video. Temptation is something we all experience as Christians. For us, it usually doesn't take the form of resisting a marshmallow. In most cases, in fact, the consequences of succumbing to temptation are a lot more serious than that. Perhaps it is a temptation to gossip, be lazy, visit a particular website or tell a lie which enables you to cover your tracks.

Temptation comes to us in various forms. However, for most of us, temptation seems to be heightened at times of great stress or tiredness - two feelings that I'm sure you will agree are common during exam season. So, this month as you face temptations of various kinds, what do you need to remember? Why not consider the following:

- **Pray** - Jesus' words in Matthew 26:41 are clear - praying is our most important tool at our disposal when fighting off temptation. We are to pray both before temptation comes and in the midst of temptation itself.
- **Fear** - Oftentimes, the reason we give into temptation is because we convince ourselves that succumbing to the particular sin in question isn't really a big deal. In this case, having a healthy fear of God is important. Yes, God is gracious and kind, but he also takes sin seriously. He knows the destruction it causes his children.
- **Remember** - Temptation makes us forget. It causes us to lose sense of reality. We forget how giving into this temptation the last time didn't fulfil us. In fact, it only made matters worse. Temptation makes us short sighted and causes us to neglect the feelings of guilt that are sure to follow. In summary, temptation is nothing more than sugar coated poison.

So, this month, as you face various temptations, pray, fear and remember!

Even during Exams...

You can be a witness



Day 12



1 Peter 3:15

I hate country music. This may offend you. However, for me, there is nothing to like about it. It's not just the sound of country music that bothers me, I don't even like the culture that surrounds it. Checked shirts, brown boots and cowboy hats just don't do it for me. Now, don't misunderstand me. If you like country music, that's fine. I don't mind that you like it. However, it's just not for me.

I wonder if it's possible that you view 'being a witness' in the same way that I view country music. It's fine for other people, but it's just not your thing. You may even admire the fact that other Christians make the effort to tell people about Jesus, but it's just not something that you feel needs to concern you.

There is a bit of a problem with this sort of thinking. The Bible seems to suggest that, by virtue of being a Christian, you are to be a witness. Christians are those who are the 'salt of the earth', a 'city on a hill' and a 'lamp that shines before others.' To be a Christian, then, is to testify to others the reality of who God is - both in what we say and how we act.

So, how can you be a good witness in an exam season like this one? Allow me to make a few suggestions:

- Make time to help friends and classmates if they are struggling to grasp a particular topic. As a witness of Jesus Christ, we are not merely concerned with ourselves but with serving those around us.
- Work with diligence and integrity. The book of Proverbs encourages us to be like an ant. The ant works hard, even in the absence of supervision. As a witness of Jesus Christ, we work with diligence to make the most of the gifts and abilities God has given us
- Acknowledge that getting 'good grades' isn't everything. Yes, we work hard and try our best, but as a witness of Jesus Christ, we recognise that we have a God who is ultimately in control of all things and he has a purposeful plan for my life.
- Make time for church. Imagine giving up your Saturday night to serve at your church's youth club. Who in their right mind would sacrifice their only free evening in the week to go to the prayer meeting? It might seem crazy, but as a good witness of Jesus Christ, we recognise the importance of meeting with God's people. In a stressful season like this one, church doesn't become less of a priority, but more of a priority.

Pray that God would enable you to be a good witness this year.

Even during Exams...

Your future is certain



Day 13



Romans 8:28

I'm a massive football fan. To be more specific, I am a massive Arsenal fan. There are few things I enjoy more than sitting on the sofa watching an Arsenal game. Although, truth be told, if you were to watch me during a game, you would probably question whether or not I was actually enjoying myself. For me, watching an Arsenal game quite often involves a lot of shouting at the TV and nervous fidgeting as I eagerly anticipate what the outcome of the game will be.

It's a very different experience when I watch a game back for the 2nd or 3rd time (yes I sometimes do this). On these occasions, there isn't the same nervous energy. I don't tend to shout quite as much, or at all. Why? Well, in this case, I already know the final score. I am not nervously awaiting a future, unknown outcome. Rather, the outcome is secure. As I watch the match, there is nothing that the players can do which will change the final result. In summary, I am a lot more at peace when I can be sure of the outcome.

In life, most people operate as if they don't know how it will all end for them. This is part of the reason why we live in such an anxious and frustrated world. As Christians, however, we have a completely different perspective. Of course, in one sense we don't know everything about the future. What job will you have? Will you get married? Who will you get married to? Where will you live? What age will you be when you die? There are lots of things about the future that we can not know. However, there are some things that we absolutely can know!

Paul says to the Romans that one thing we can be absolutely certain of is that God is working all things together for the good of his people. Think about that for a few moments. Regardless of what happens in your life, God is working it all together for your good. This doesn't mean he is guaranteeing you a life of abundance and prosperity. But it does mean that God will use you how he best sees fit for his eternal, glorious purpose.

In times like exam season, I find this to be such a comfort. For most people, their exam performance seems to be one of the things that dictates how their life will pan out. Messing these up feels like your messing up some of the outcomes of your life. The Christian has a totally different perspective however. Today, know this - you are not powerful enough to ruin God's plan for your life and his world. He is committed to working all things together for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Even during Exams...

Your identity is in Christ



Day 14



2 Cor 5:17

"Tell me about yourself." How do people most commonly respond to such a request? More often than not, adults will reply by stating the job that they work. For example, "my name is Dave and I'm an engineer", or 'my name is Jenny and I'm a teacher.'" In life, our identity often feels bound up with what we do. It feels like a part of who we are. In that regard, our identity is always something that needs to be achieved and maintained. It is not something that is secure, we must work to keep it intact.

However, the Bible gives us a totally different perspective on our primary identity as Christians. The moment we give our lives to Christ, we are now 'united to him.' Another way the Bible describes this is by referring to Christians as those who are 'in Christ.' As believers, we receive a new identity upon conversion, one that is not bound up in our performance but in the finished work of Jesus.

Isn't that liberating? Doesn't that relieve us of so much of the pressure we put on ourselves? Perhaps you view your primary identity as being a good sportsperson. In that case, you will feel crushed when you are dropped from the first team - your identity becomes shattered. Maybe you view your primary identity as being intelligent. In that case, an exam result gone wrong brings with it crippling feelings of anxiety - once again, your sense of identity is shattered.

In Christ, our identity is secure and eternal. Our performance in this life (whether in your job, sports team, exams or anything else) is completely irrelevant. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the old has gone and the new has come. As one of God's people, you are eternally loved, accepted and called his child.

In the midst of your studies, be encouraged that your performance does not threaten your primary identity. Regardless of your results, you are united to Christ. Your identity is now found completely in him.

Even during Exams...

God's word can be trusted



Day 15



John 17:17

We live in a day and age where it's increasingly difficult to know who or what can be trusted. Every day we find ourselves asking questions like 'Is that YouTube video title clickbait? Is the image photoshopped? Is this information exaggerated? Is this video artificially generated? Is this recommendation just an attempt to sell me a product or service? Is this article true or just a conspiracy theory?

With all this uncertainty, don't you long for a source of truth? Don't you long to find someone or something you can be sure is completely trustworthy?

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is the longest prayer recorded by Jesus in Scripture. It is sometimes known as the 'high priestly prayer.' Jesus is praying to God the father for his followers. In verse 17, we are given two very important reminders:

- 1 - We are sanctified (or made holy) by truth
- 2 - This truth can be found in God's word

As we long for something that can be trusted in a world full of lies, let us remember that the only and ultimate source of complete truth can be found in God's word alone.

The information we read online can not be completely trusted. The advice we receive from even our wisest friends might not always be completely sound. The material we memorise for our exams might not be 100% accurate.

God's word, however, is completely true and trustworthy. Therefore, today, make time to read and study God's word.

Even during Exams...

Church is vital



Day 16



Heb 10:25

When I was at school, a few of my friends and I would regularly debate this question - would you rather be world class at a particular sport or musical instrument? As we would go back and forth debating this question, we would inevitably come to the same conclusion - it would be better to be world class at sport. Of course, you might not agree with this decision, but on the basis that sportsmen typically earn more money and fame, this is where we landed.

However, the debate didn't end here. We would proceed to extend the debate by asking 'if you could only be world class at one sport, which sport would you choose?' Some loved the thought of football, others hockey, still others rugby. Interestingly, however, two sports rarely made the top spot in our debate - tennis and golf.

The reason tennis and golf didn't make top spot was because they are individual sports. There would be something a little bit more lonely about being a professional tennis or golf player. You don't get to enjoy the same camaraderie as team sports like football, rugby or hockey. Furthermore, all the pressure you face, you face alone. There's no one you can talk to who really understands what you're experiencing.

I wonder is it possible that you view your Christian faith in this same way? I wonder if, for you, Christianity has become a 'solo sport.' For sure, you are seeking to run the Christian life, but you run it alone.

This individualistic approach to the Christian life is completely out of step with the New Testament. The Christian life was never meant to be ran alone. God created us to serve, worship and follow him as part of a community. This is why God gave us the local church.

The book of Hebrews was written to struggling Christians. Those who were tempted to compromise their faith in an attempt to be more accepted by those around them. Interestingly, one of the themes that the author of Hebrews comes back to is the importance of Christians spurring one another on. Again, it is this reminder that as believers we can not run alone - we need one another.

During exam time, it can be especially tempting to try and run the Christian life alone. Even simply taking a few hours out of your schedule to attend church might, if you're honest, feel like a few hours that could have been spent more productively in the books. However, let's remember that this is not the case. Investing in the local church is always worth it. It is not optional. It is not a waste of time. It is one of the most important things you should prioritize in your week. Why? Because Christianity is not a solo sport. If we want to run the Christian race well, we must run it together.

Even during Exams...

You can pray in confidence



Day 17



Phil 4:6

There was a well known saying in the second world war - 'there are no atheists in foxholes.' As a soldier found himself in the middle of battle, ducked down in a trench, standing in the middle of the firing line as gunshots were aimed in his direction, he would find himself praying. Even if this soldier identified as an atheist, in his desperation he would find himself appealing to some deity in the heavens.

This observation reveals something about human nature. At our deepest level, we are created to live in a relationship with the God who made us. In truth, we can all probably relate to the soldier in view. We all find ourselves praying more intensely when we are in a state of desperation. Whether it is airplane turbulence or a health scare, the intensity of our prayer life seems to be directly proportional to our sense of need.

Exam season can be one time where we feel such desperation. Perhaps as you sit in the exam room nervously about to open your paper, or as you ponder the implications of not getting the results you need, you find yourself instinctively praying. Exam season helps us realize the fact that we are vulnerable people. We are not as 'in control' as we otherwise like to think.

As Christians, however, when we think about our prayer life we ought to move on from mere 'desperation prayers.' In fact, Paul encourages the Philippians to pray about 'everything'. Elsewhere he encourages his readers to pray 'at all times.' In other words, prayer should not just be our last resort. It is not plan Z. It is not the thing we turn to when everything else fails. Prayer is plan A. It is, for the believer, like oxygen is to the human body. As we have been invited into the family of God, speaking to him becomes the natural impulse of our hearts.

This month, why not take the 'emergency prayers' that you will, no doubt, find yourself praying and seek to make them a catalyst for an ongoing, consistent prayer life with your heavenly father. He doesn't just want to hear from you in times of need.

He wants you to enjoy daily communion with him as you journey through the Christian life. Remember - prayer is not just something you should do, it is something you get to do.

Even during Exams...

You can avoid laziness



Day 18



Prov 6:6-11

If you could be any animal in the world, what would you choose? That is probably not a question you ponder so much these days. But when you were younger (maybe in Primary School), these are the sort of debates you would have with your friends. Inevitably, kids always tend to choose big, powerful animals like lions or tigers. Who wouldn't want to be like them?

However, as we read Proverbs 6, the writer encourages us to aspire to be like a different animal. In reality, this is not the sort of animal you might naturally find yourself being drawn towards. The animal in question is, as you see in v6, the ant.

Who would want to be like an ant? Likening someone to an ant seems more like an insult than anything else. However, there is one particular characteristic about the ant which the teacher in Proverbs wants to draw our attention to - it's diligence. The ant has no supervisor. No one is looking over the ant's shoulder, holding them accountable for their actions. Yet, the ant is relentless in its output. The ant always seeks to be productive.

The ant is presented in Proverbs 6 as everything that 'the sluggard' is not. Who is the sluggard? Well it is the lazy type of person that Proverbs urges us not to be. The sort of person who is everything that the ant is not.

The reality is, our 21st century Western world provides the perfect conditions for sluggards to thrive. Technology has made laziness an easy default position. Particularly as a student - how easy is it to get up late, laze around and waste your day watching mindless entertainment on Netflix and YouTube. The world presents such a lifestyle as a picture of fun and freedom. However, the Bible says that the opposite is true.

Man was created to have dominion over creation. We are created to rule and reign. We are all, as humans, not created to be passive observers but active participants. We are to fight against our sinful proclivity towards idleness and laziness. It might seem odd, but being diligent in our studies is one such way we can engage in this fight.

Today, as you study and learn, don't think about it as something that you have to do in order to tick a box. Why not think about it as a means of glorifying God. Think of it as a means of fulfilling your creation mandate. As you study and engage your mind, you are doing one of the things that God, in his perfect wisdom, has created us to do.

Even during Exams...

You can know peace



Day 19



John 14:27

Peace is not a word that you could use to describe our world right now. If you watch the news, scroll through your social media feed, or simply have a conversation with someone on the street, you will soon realize that our world is chaotic. It's a topsy turvey world where conflict and turbulence rule. However, it is into this very world that Jesus promises to leave us with his peace in John 14:27.

You might ask, on what basis can Jesus offer us peace? How is this something that his followers can experience and enjoy in a world so void of anything remotely resembling 'peace?' Well notice 2 clues in the surrounding verses..

Firstly, we as God's people can experience peace because we know that God is with us. In the verse directly before this (v26), Jesus has promised to send his Holy Spirit to indwell the hearts and minds of his followers. This Spirit would be our helper. He would be a source of power and protection. Imagine how you would feel walking into a war alone as opposed to how you would feel walking into a war with 1000 armed soldiers beside you. Which scenario would bring you a greater sense of peace? The later. Why? Not because of you but because of who accompanies you. So it is with this life. God hasn't just left us to it. His Spirit accompanies us and that should bring us peace.

Secondly, we as God's people can experience peace because we have been warned and informed about the future (v29-20). If you watch a film that you've seen 100 times before, you don't feel anywhere near as unsettled and concerned for the characters when watching it. Why? Because you already know how it all pans out. You can watch it with a greater sense of peace. The same is true for us as God's people. Jesus told us that the world would be chaotic. But he also told us that his people will prevail. In light of this, we as his people can live with the comfort of knowing how the story of this world will ultimately end.

As you think about your life right now, it may feel very easy to be unsettled. Of course, there are still many outcomes and future events that we haven't been made aware of yet. What will my results be? Will I get onto the course I want? Will that loved one get better? However, pray today that the truth of God's word would provide you with a deep level of peace. Our God goes with us through all the highs and lows of this life and he has promised that he will keep us to the very end.

Even during Exams...

You can look forward



Day 20



Rev 21:1-4

We all love happy endings. We long for it when watching movies or reading books. And the good news of the cosmos is there is a very happy ending for all those who trust in Christ. At the end of the Bible, we are given a beautiful glimpse into how happy an ending it will be for God's people. Notice three truths relating to how this world will ultimately end:

Firstly, in God's world, good will conquer evil. In today's world, there are countless examples of how evil seems to conquer good. The student who cheats in the exam gets the best mark. The individual who is the most rude is also the most popular. It is an upside down world in that regard. However, Revelation promises us a day when God will make all things right. The source of ultimate good (God) will defeat the source of ultimate evil (satan). For those of us who are Christians, we get to enjoy the victory won for us by our king and ruler - Jesus Christ.

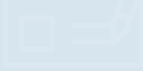
Secondly, in God's world, unity will conquer hostility. The end of the Bible paints the picture of a wedding celebration. Why a wedding? Well, weddings are a picture of unity - a husband is being united in a special way to his wife. At the end of history, Jesus (the groom) will be perfectly united to his bride (the church). All that sin which still indwells your heart and trips you up will be gone forever.

Thirdly, in God's world, joy conquers sadness. Did you notice the language of v4? God is going to wipe away every tear from the eyes of his people. Think about the many things which make you sad, anxious, fearful or unsettled in your life. All of that will be completely banished in the new heavens and new earth. The repeated word in chapter 19 of Revelation is 'Hallelujah', which means 'praise the Lord.' Everything short of perfection will be, on that day, a distant memory.

Until then, our days are filled with highs and lows. We have good days and bad days. We have encouraging weeks and challenging weeks. In my own experience as a young person, exam season can be one of the more challenging times of the year. What can help you throughout this time, however, is to zoom out and catch a glimpse of the glorious future that awaits you as a Christian.

Before you know it, exam season will be over. Yet, in truth, before you know it your life will also be over. For those who have trusted Christ, this is not a scary thought but an exciting one. We will be ushered into the new heavens and new earth where evil, hostility and sadness make way for goodness, unity and joy.

**For more info,
visit www.byouth.org**



byouth[®]