

Our Devotion: “Be Still” by Lindsey Metzger of Indianapolis, Indiana, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“For I know the plans I have for you-’ this is the Lord’s declaration- ‘plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’” Jeremiah 29:11 (HCSB)

I don’t know about you, but I have a lot of anxiety. It affects me everyday; in decision making, trying new things, writing, and thinking about my future.

Over J-term this school year, I decided to try cross fit. I had no prior knowledge of what a cross fit workout required physically, but I wanted to try it, so I did. Long story short, it requires a lot of strength. I have no muscular structure whatsoever, so I ended up having an anxiety attack my first night.

I hate hearing people edit my writing. I’m very sensitive, so when people edit something I wrote, I feel like they’re comments are aimed at me and not my work. I end up shutting down and not hearing what they’re saying to make my writing better.

I think I want to get my Master’s degree in Library Science, but I’m going to have to foot the bill for grad school. The cheapest option I’ve found so far is over \$50,000 and I have no way to pay for it.

I’ve prayed for a while about all these problems that have pushed me to my breaking point. God answered them all with a simple phrase.

Be still.

If you’re waiting for a magic answer from God, He’s waiting for you to seek Him. Seek God, and don’t lose faith. God is in control.

Prayer: Father, I feel lost. Give me peace and show me the way You’re leading me in Your time. Amen.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Future” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” Matthew 6:26 (NIV)

“On the climb up the mountain, make sure to stop a few times to check the view.”

I rolled my eyes. How did our leader expect us to follow those directions? The legs of everyone in my senior class twitched in agitation. Already, certain classmates exchanged bets as to who would reach the top the fastest.

The second my leader wedged his sneaker at the foot of the mountain, the anxious assembly stampeded forward. Several classmates hiked up their legs and commenced a turkey trot. Some even sprinted. Fretful to keep up, I stumbled up the hill and shoved my way past several slower peers. I kept my eyes glued to the top of the mountain. Nothing else mattered.

Fiery thorns wrapped around my lungs, and I began to hyperventilate. I doubled over and wheezed. My asthma must have climbed up the mountain quicker than I did. I collapsed on the ground. Disappointed, I heard the cheers of my classmates. However, my frustration melted when I turned away from the top to spy the view. After gazing at the tangerine sun and evergreen slope of the mountain, I wished I'd stopped more than that one time.

Often future plans veil our vision. When we climb up the mountain, we want to reach the top. Perhaps we should stop and enjoy the present moment, and take time to gaze downward upon our past. We might be surprised with how far we have climbed.

Prayer: Help me not to have tunnel vision when I make plans for the future. Amen.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Present” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)

The cartoon speckled frog refused to jump.

During his childhood, my brother had a computer game that required complete concentration. In order to play, he strapped on a rosy helmet that read neuron activity. Whenever he devoted all his attention to the game, the characters on the screen would move. However, if his mind darted in another direction, the creatures on the screen would remain motionless.

Before he fastened on the helmet, my mom wore the headpiece to test out the game. Her emerald irises fixated themselves to the screen. The cartoon amphibian bounded from one lily pad to the next. When he crossed the turquoise river, he had never wavered once on the journey. But, when my brother buckled the helmet straps under his chin, the frog froze. It took thirty minutes for my brother’s mind to calm in order for the creature to hurdle off the final lily pad.

Like my brother, my mind often jumps to six different rivers at once. When in reality, I should focus on the characters with me in the room. If I devote only a portion of my attention to those present, like the frog, our relationship cannot progress.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, wherever you lead me today, help me to avoid distractions.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Light” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Despite having to complete flips, somersaults, and risky stunts on stage, the most hazardous part of the performance happened backstage.

Thirty of us entered a squashed closet and tripped over several sharp props, including some swords from *The Pirates of Penzance*. The thick silence tasted like sweat as we all tried to seek refuge in a spot absent of spiky set pieces. Suddenly, blue beams flooded the closet. Our stage manager ignited a light, and the trial with the biting darkness ended. We found a safe haven to play UNO and exchange jubilant bits of chatter. We threw triumphant smirks at the once-hazardous swords. No longer would they trick us into tripping over them.

One of the cast members ventured in front of the light and molded his hands to form shadow puppets on the wall. We watched the delightful show. The shapes transformed from a bat to a spider to a bird to a—

The cast member hissed in pain and withdrew his arm. His hand had drifted too close to the light, and the heat singed his fingers. Even in the seemingly brightest and safest phase of the evening, hazards lurked.

During times of security and joy, I have a tendency to forget the spiritual battle that surrounds me each day. I often neglect caution when I need it most: during periods of ease.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me vigilance during times of comfort.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Darkness” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”
Ephesians 5:8 (NIV)

Flashes of heat lightning burnt the inky sky.

The wind tore through the shadows of trees. They bent and twisted in every direction, unable to control the dark storm’s blows. Thunder reverberated so much the sound shook our house. The scent of buttery popcorn and anxiety overpowered the kitchen when I asked my sister to give a weather report. She flipped to a channel on the TV. Just as a reporter announced, “A severe thunderstorm warning . . . ,” the lights went out.

My heart struck my ribcage savagely. The darkness had clouded my vision. My pupils flit around the kitchen, but I could only perceive silhouettes on the wall whenever the lightning flared. The shadows resembled nightmarish creatures with needle-like teeth and narrowed eyes. All of my artificial light sources could no longer protect me. Briars encircled my lungs, and I struggled to breathe.

Suddenly, light flooded the kitchen as my sister ignited a candle. The figures on the wall melted, and the warm glow somehow deafened the growls of thunder. I hovered close to the light and felt at last I could breathe again.

Whenever storms extinguish false beams of hope in my life, I often fail to forget I have the light of the world thriving inside of me. Instead of choking in darkness, I need to fly toward the candle which strengthens me in my battles against shadows.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to seek you during my darkest hours.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Wilderness” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.” Isaiah 35:1 (NIV)

The miserable plane landed, but we didn’t exit the aircraft.

After six dismal hours of delays, massive turbulence, faulty air conditioning, and a less-than-subtle decrease in fuel, our jet landed in Costa Rica. However, the workers failed to fill the plane with enough fuel to venture to the gate. So we had to wait for other employees to replenish the gas.

I slumped against my seat and emitted a groan. I imagined our extended family, who had boarded a different plane, had already obtained five adventures by the time we would collect our bags. Why did we have to wait on the runway wilderness while our family enjoyed the paradise of Costa Rica?

After a period of delays, we exited the aircraft. The sun kissed our cheeks. When we joined the rest of the family, they would offer a complaint about insects or the temperature. We didn’t mind. With every step, we inhaled and exhaled each breath with a certain amount of elation. Because we had experienced a trial of postponement, we basked in every detail of the new stage of life when we left the wilderness of the plane.

The more I waited for paradise, the more joy I felt when I entered it.

Prayer: Please help me to appreciate times of waiting and delays.

Our Devotion: “Waiting in the Uncertainty” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.”
Mark 4:37 (NIV)

Our boat swayed back and forth with tremendous force.

I watched the black waves from a window inside the ship. The ominous whitecaps clapped against the roof of the vessel. I tore my eyes away from the wall of breakers and attempted to distract myself. A few sparse and dizzy members populated the room as we watched a movie. The rest of the nauseated inhabitants ventured downstairs to rest.

Like the disciples in the midst of a storm, I wondered how my fellow passengers could sleep during such a squall. I had tested a few diversions such as a game of checkers, Euchre, and a movie, but my eyes always trailed to the tunnel of inky waves. When the film concluded, we ventured to our beds. The entire night, I wondered whether I would awake to a calm sea or a capsized boat.

During uncertain stages of life, I have a tendency to either distract myself from the vagueness or concentrate all of my attention on it. Like my fellow ship mates, I should acknowledge I have entered an unclear period. However, I need to trust in the Maker of the waves. Only then can I truly rest in the midst of the storm.

Prayer: Holder of my future, please help me to trust during times of ambiguity.

Our Devotion: “Life Line” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Then we will no longer be infants . . . blown here and there by every wind of teaching.”
Ephesians 4:14 (NIV)

The canyon plummeted four hundred feet.

My right gloved hand gripped the cable which held my harness. My zip line instructors warned me to never release the rope. Rather, I had to keep my thumb and forefinger encircling the life line at all times. Even though the harness secured against the rope so I wouldn't fall, they still advised me to never liberate my grip.

I shoved myself off the platform and whizzed down the cable. My right hand continued to clasp the rope, and I maintained my balance. I glanced downward at the forest beneath me. My hand jerked free and clutched my heart when I gazed at the four-hundred-foot drop. However, the second I released the life line, my harness began to spin uncontrollably. My arms flailed as I attempted to regain my clasp.

As Christians, Jesus serves as our harness. Even when we let go of him, he continues to cling to us. However, when we place our faith in anything but the life line, and we release our grip, our lives tend to whirl out of control.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to remember to always hold on tightly to you. Amen.

Our Devotion: “Smooth Sailing” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Now Jehoshaphat built a fleet of trading ships to go to Ophir for gold, but they never set sail—they were wrecked at Ezion Geber.” 1 Kings 22:48 (NIV)

The cardboard boat deteriorated in the rippling waters.

The creator of the ship, my friend, recounted the story to me. A week before the event, my friend eagerly sketched the blueprints for the annual robotics club cardboard boat race. However, his not-so-zealous project partner built the vessel. By the time the cohort slapped the ship together, corners jutted and the entire structure nearly crumbled. During the event, the dilapidated liner glided about five feet into the frigid waters. Then, it proceeded to plummet in a whirlpool of foam and the scent of sulfur.

Like Judah’s King Jehoshaphat, my friend generated ambitious plans for the future. However, he teamed up with the wrong partner, a King Ahaziah-like figure. Because of a friendship with a man who led him astray, he sunk rather than sailed.

It was a good reminder that when we befriend someone we might want to implement discernment. Does this person help us sail smoothly in our faith? Or do we notice a potential shipwreck?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please help me to implement discernment with my friendships. Amen.

Our Devotion: “Take Charge” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10 (NIV)

Our youth group played several rounds of laser tag once a year. The battleground landscape had two tiers, each with a charging station resting at the top. Managers divided us into two teams: orange and green. Assigned onto the green team, I heaved on a bulky vest. It slapped against my chest, wafting a sweaty stench from previous owners. Laser gun in hand, I huddled with my team by our charging station. Each blaster had a few dozen shots before it would need to return to base for a renewal. We each charged our guns before commencing a game of capture the flag.

Naturally, no one wanted to play the role of defense. So, we all rushed to the orange team’s camp as soon as the round began. Red lasers blared in every direction. One nailed me in the shoulder. The chest. The back. Our opponents targeted every defenseless sensor on our vests. I tried to fire several rounds back but ran out of “bullets” within thirty seconds. Hundreds of feet away from my charging station, I yielded helplessly to the torrents of the orange team’s lasers.

Often, I forget to return to my “charging station” spiritually: God’s Word. I enter enemy territory without recharging every day. In times like those, I find myself bombarded by fear, despair, and doubt. Without daily revitalization with God, I become vulnerable to the devil’s attacks.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to seek daily renewal in you.

Our Devotion: “(Tape)r Off” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” Matthew 5:15 (NIV)

Working backstage for *Oklahoma!*, we completed several dim, colorless tasks. We swept the hay-littered stage until our broom bristles formed tangled tumbleweeds. Our bruised biceps shook whenever we lifted the orchestra pit. Our purple fingers jutted out at awkward angles when they heaved hay bales during scene changes. But, worst of all, we had to light the glow tape.

A deck crew member hovered over the black backstage steps, hand armed with a flashlight. At the edge of each stair, a thin strip of glow tape rested. The stagehand clicked the flashlight and hoped, prayed. Proper glow tape reflects the light it absorbs. Actors will spy the alert green luminosity from the tape and avoid tripping on the steps in the darkness. Unfortunately, our tape didn't reflect light well. No matter how much time the tape absorbed the beams—five minutes, half an hour—the light faded before the first act began.

Do we, as Christians, fail to retain our glow? We absorb beams from Scripture, church, and devotionals. But, does our light sustain or, rather, taper off?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to retain my glow. Amen.

Our Devotion: “Water Works” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?” Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

The Dead Sea cannot harbor life inside its sodium-infested waters. Because it has no outlet into other water sources, it contains a poisonous amount of salt. I recently discovered a little-known fact about the Dead Sea, the saltiest lake in the world. The salt is actually bitter. It can't be used to season anything. The lake contains so much salt, it has lost its balance.

Faith without works is like the Dead Sea. This does *not* mean salvation comes through deeds. But, if we have no outlet, harboring our salt and keeping it to ourselves, we are no better than the Dead Sea. No life can thrive within us, and we will turn bitter.

PRAYER Dear Heavenly Father, don't let me be like the Dead Sea with no outlet. Amen.

Our Devotion: “The Awk Walk” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to be silent and a time to speak.” Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7 (NIV)

I was not expecting to get a mustache my freshman year of college.

I had accepted that I would probably gain a certain number of bags under my eyes and perhaps even the infamous “freshman fifteen” pounds when I came to Taylor University, but at the freshmen initiation known as the “Awk Walk,” I got another unwanted addition to the collection.

We stood shivering in a single file line next to a line of guys from our brother floor.

“Put your finger under the nose of the person right next to you to resemble a mustache!” our very enthusiastic hall director shrieked.

It was very difficult to talk with a finger stuck underneath your nose. Thus began perhaps the most awkward endeavor of my college career.

Well, that is, the most awkward except for the first time that I sat down in silence and truly tried to listen to God.

This is why Solomon emphasizes the fact that while there is a time to speak there is also a “time to be silent.” While it is necessary for us to speak to God daily, that is only half of the conversation. There is also a time to *listen*.

Silence can be a scary thing. Everywhere we are bombarded with noise pollution from music blasting through headphones on morning runs (unless you never run, like me) to billboards that practically scream at you, “You are not content until you have this product!” When we encounter silence, it can often be the loudest noise we’ve heard all day. We’ll want to find a haven of noise almost immediately.

But if we are to set aside time every day to “be still and know” that God is God, we will learn so much about him and his wonderful plan for our lives through sparing a short time a day to

silence. At first it may feel like an “Awk Talk” (you feel so awkward that you want to talk), but soon you will be amazed to find what you will hear God say in the silence.

Prayer: Lord, help me to learn to be silent and listen to you.

Our Devotion: “Hanging by a Thread” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

Haley and I had the “Dangling Duo” all figured out.

“We can do it,” I said, with a hint of uncertainty as I stared up at the twenty-foot dangling ladder. It didn't help that the girl who went before us was hanging upside-down while her partner, unaware of this, had reached the top.

After the counselors reeled both girls back in, they reminded Haley and I that *both* of us needed to reach the top in order for the trust exercise to count. They snapped us into our harnesses and our plan commenced. I kneeled as Haley used my leg to propel onto the first wooden rung. Then, she grabbed my harness and helped hoist me onto the platform.

We were the first to make it to the top.

Galatians 6:2 commands Christians to bear one another's burdens. It seems easy to make the climb up the obstacles of life on our own, leaving a fellow brother and sister to dangle upside-down helplessly. It takes a commitment to sacrifice time to help boost a fellow Christian onto the next beam of spiritual growth. But, the end result is breathtaking and worth the climb.

Prayer: Lord, you have not created us to climb this life alone. Teach us to bear one another's burdens.

Our Devotion: “Blinded Blessings” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

I hated being tall. They always shoved me toward the back of group pictures. Forget about buying a pair of jeans that fitted! Finding a prom date was like reading the book of Ecclesiastes without seeing the word “meaningless.” At football games, I would often hear a spectator behind me complain he or she couldn’t see the last play on the field. Once, in fact, a director did not give me a part in a play because I was “too tall” and would stand out on stage. I longed nearly every day to be six inches shorter.

But, as I headed to an annual college Christmas banquet a girl from my residence hall struggled uphill in a pair of large heels. She was at least a foot shorter than me and stared at my flats enviously. “Hope,” she said, panting hard, “people like me always are jealous of people with heights like yours. You don’t have to make this hard climb uphill.”

All my life I’d seen my height as a curse, but others perceived it as an enormous blessing. How often do we do this in our lives? We often will complain about attributes God has given us when others would love to have them. God’s blessings are like a giant, you would have to be blind not to see them.

Prayer: Thank you for how you have blessed me, Lord. Remind me to be grateful that you made me just the way I am.

Our Devotion: “Swing Low” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”
Isaiah 41:10 (NASB)

The Costa Rican tour guides called it “the Tarzan swing.” I called it “my premature death.” Even though I had watched my cousin, dad, and sister take a leap of faith off of a fifty-foot platform wearing a mere harness attached to a rope, I was convinced our family’s next destination after zip lining would be my funeral. The tour guides weren’t helping as they strapped me into the harness. “Only five people have died the Tarzan swing,” they joked. “All of them were wearing black bandanas.” I was wearing a black bandana. I inhaled deeply as I felt my heart leap into my feet. I closed my eyes and jumped.

We enter several stages of our life when we feel caught in freefall. A recent death in the family, saying goodbye to friends to embark on a new adventure, or finding a job in a vicious market all leave us feeling like we’ve been launched into a den of lions. But God is like our harness. He will never snap under the pressures of this world. He carries our burdens with us and lifts us to the other side of the platform.

Prayer: Each day offers me challenges. Help me to trust you, even when I’m afraid.

Our Devotion: “Throw Me for a Loop” by Hope Bolinger of Hudson, Ohio, a professional writing student at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

“In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground.” Genesis 4:3 (ESV)

We sprinted quarter-mile repeats that day in track. After we made one loop around the track and gulped in a breath of air for a fifteen-second breather, our coach barked at us to run the next four hundred meters two seconds faster than the previous circuit. Another loop, another two seconds shaved . . . and so on.

For the first handful of laps, I doubled over into my stomach, pumping my legs as fast as they could hit the track. But, the challenge became too much for my lungs and my burning calves. By the fourth repeat, I slowed my pace until I would just scarcely pass the finish line with the time Coach required for that round. For the rest of practice, I met the bare minimum requirement for each leg of the race.

Like Cain, I gave something . . . but I did not offer my all, my first fruits like his brother Abel had. Feeling guilt overflow in my chest after that practice, I learned that a withheld sacrifice is not a sacrifice at all. I understood that I should not give unless I planned to give everything.

Prayer: Father, I often do not present to you my first fruits; I do not offer you my all. May I live a life of giving instead of holding back. Amen.