

WEEK FIVE • DAY ONE

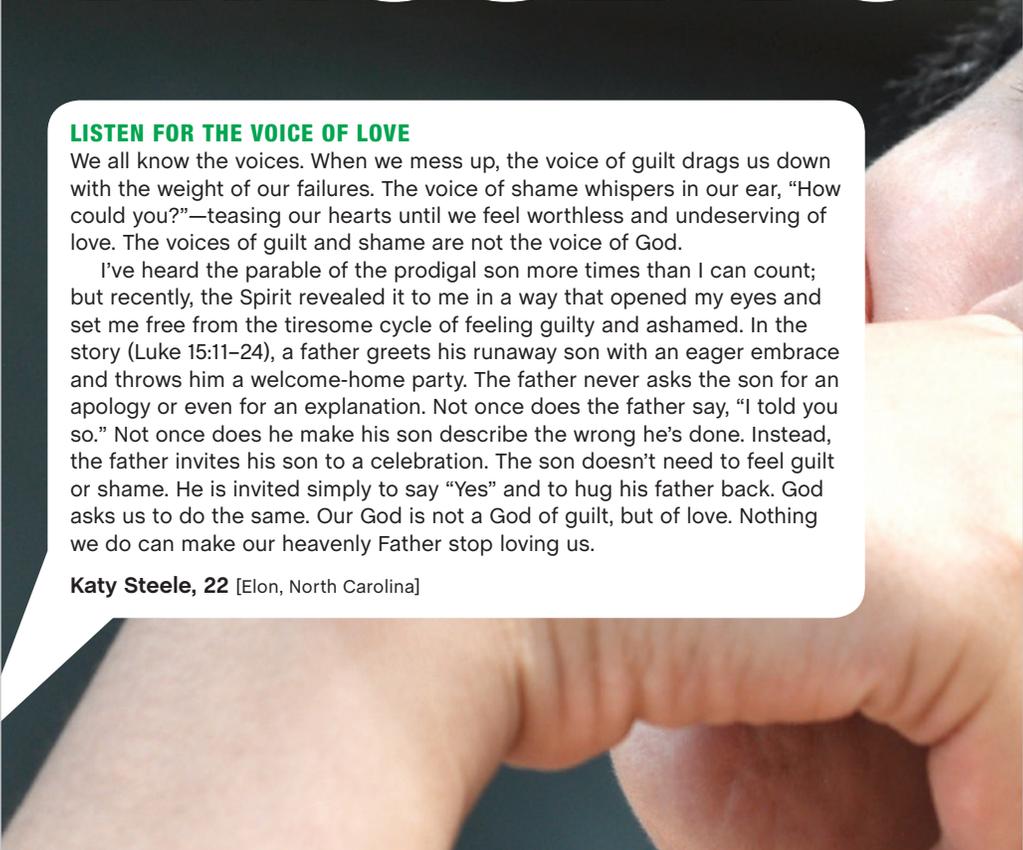
GUILT AND SHAME

GUILT AND SHAME

WEEKEND!

Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love
for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! Romans 8:39b (CEV)

WHOSE VOICE



LISTEN FOR THE VOICE OF LOVE

We all know the voices. When we mess up, the voice of guilt drags us down with the weight of our failures. The voice of shame whispers in our ear, "How could you?"—teasing our hearts until we feel worthless and undeserving of love. The voices of guilt and shame are not the voice of God.

I've heard the parable of the prodigal son more times than I can count; but recently, the Spirit revealed it to me in a way that opened my eyes and set me free from the tiresome cycle of feeling guilty and ashamed. In the story (Luke 15:11–24), a father greets his runaway son with an eager embrace and throws him a welcome-home party. The father never asks the son for an apology or even for an explanation. Not once does the father say, "I told you so." Not once does he make his son describe the wrong he's done. Instead, the father invites his son to a celebration. The son doesn't need to feel guilt or shame. He is invited simply to say "Yes" and to hug his father back. God asks us to do the same. Our God is not a God of guilt, but of love. Nothing we do can make our heavenly Father stop loving us.

Katy Steele, 22 [Elon, North Carolina]

36 MAY>JUNE 2014

may 26–june 1

WEEK FIVE • DAY ONE

GUILT AND SHAME

GUILT AND SHAME

WEEKEND!



VOICE?

WELCOME GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Dear Father,
I stop and marvel that I can call you "Father" and that you claim me as your child. Shame tells me that I am a flaw, an error, a problem. But who I am comes from you. What I say and believe about myself reflects what I say and believe about you. I know you are good. I know you are wonderful. I know that your personality, your make-up, is the source of who and what I am.

Still, I wrestle with guilt that is vague, dark, and oppressive. All I know is that I am not enough. I do not have enough. I do not understand enough. I suspect I do everything wrong. But I hear you saying that you do not oppress with guilt. Rather, you turn with conviction and heal with repentance. Shame is not a tool you use. How could you? You are God. Self-hatred is a sin against you.

When your voice is clear and shows me where I have gone wrong and how I must turn, I welcome it and thank you for the voice of your Spirit, setting me free. When the voice is vague or tells me I am worthless, useless, and shameful, I recognize it as another: the voice of one who comes "to rob, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10, CEV).

Father, I will believe, love, and welcome you. I reject all other voices.

Your Child

Rachel Starr Thomson [Ontario, Canada]

www.devozine.org

MAY>JUNE 2014 37

WEEK FIVE • DAY ONE

GUILT AND SHAME

GUILT AND SHAME

WEEKEND!



1 NEXT DAY STRETCH

LIVE IN GOD'S PROMISE

I struggle with forgiving myself. I'm hard on myself. I have a habit of replaying my mistakes over and over again in my head. Yet, God tells me that my mistakes are not too big for God to forgive. God forgave the people who killed his son. God forgave Paul, who hurt and killed God's children. Throughout the gospels, Jesus says, "You are forgiven." Nothing is too big a mistake for God to forgive. God forgives our selfish mistakes and horrible thoughts; God forgives anything we've done or will ever do. <

Victoria Guyadeen, 20
[Milford, Pennsylvania]

38 MAY>JUNE 2014

may 26–june 1

WEEK FIVE • DAY TWO

GUILT AND SHAME

FAILURE

WEEKEND!

STEVE
MATTHEWS

an invitation to re- engage ²³

Faith is a journey, not a destination. And God's love and grace accompanies us every step of the way. Unfortunately, our society and even the people closest to us can become focused on day-to-day "destinations," which often show up in the guise of goals and expectations, successes and failures: Did we get into the college we wanted? Did we make the cross-country team? Are we good-looking enough or funny enough to attract that "special someone"? How will we know when we have arrived—when we are "good enough"?

26 NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2019

november 18-24

WEEK FIVE • DAY TWO

GUILT AND SHAME

FAILURE

WEEKEND!

We are going to fail. We fail because we are human and thus imperfect, and sometimes the pain of failure can be severe. I often wonder if our measures for “success” and our society’s fear of failure set us up for suffering. Having goals and feeling that we are moving forward are important, but we also need to be aware of whose standards we are trying to meet. God cares for us because of who we are, not because of what we do or don’t do. I think God cares less about our standards for success and more about the ways we open ourselves up to love and new possibilities.

Even when we fail at things that truly matter to us, God encourages us to pick ourselves up, to engage again in life, and to partner with God in creative acts. Wallowing in shame, blame, or guilt can keep us stuck; God’s love is always on the move, calling us forward. “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NRSV).

In so many ways, failure is an invitation into a spiritual practice of forgiveness, re-engagement, and hope. Theologian C. Robert Mesle writes, “God is constantly, in every moment and in every place, doing everything within God’s power to bring about the good. . . . God works by sharing with us a vision of the better way, of the good and the beautiful.” Yes, we will fail; but in these moments, the invitation is always to deeper relationship with God and to reengagement with God’s creative energy. <

Steve Matthews was a youth minister for over 15 years. He is now a spiritual director, a coach working with redeveloping churches, a Senior Associate Consultant with FaithX Strategic Missional Consulting, and the producer of StoryPaths, a program of the Episcopal Church that collates stories of local church and neighborhood transformation.

24 NEXT DAY STRETCH

This week pay attention to your failures—even the small ones. Notice what you say to yourself and how you treat yourself when you fail. Do you beat yourself up? Is your sense of failure based on unrealistic expectations imposed on you by society or by another person? Or is it based on a violation of your own standards of behavior or perhaps God’s?

Take a deep breath. Now rebound. Name what is happening inside of you. Be aware of God’s presence and activity in the world, and choose to re-engage with life. “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, NRSV). The world needs your expression of God’s love lived out to its fullest. Even when we fail, God meets us in the next moment and calls us to loving, creative action. What is your call in this moment? What is your next step in the journey of faith?

www.devozine.org

NOVEMBER>DECEMBER 2019 **27**

WEEK FIVE • DAY THREE

GUILT AND SHAME

PAIN & HEALING



PRAYER:

God, you promise a time without crying or pain. Sit with us now, in our distress, as a sign of your coming kingdom. Amen.

In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Isaiah 63:9 (NIV)

ENOUGH

Alina Kanaski, 24 [Tucson, Arizona]

I want you in my life, God.
I need you.
But I don't know how
to do this strange relationship.
If you were human,
you'd have been driven away long ago
by my avoidance,
my stubbornness.

But you are faithful.
You are my rock,
my song,
my savior.
You are faithful, forever faithful.

I cling to those promises
when you seem distant.
When I am afraid,
you are always here, beside me.

That knowledge hasn't changed my fear
nor my shame.
But someday it will.
For now,
you sit with me in my pain,
and it is enough.
Praise the Lord! <

WEEK FIVE • DAY FOUR

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Can We Talk?

AngelaGay Kinkead

The spiritual practice of Christian conversation takes place when two or more Christians intentionally discuss their faith and talk with one another about seeking wisdom and God's will.

I hear it several times a day. I hear it in humble moments, in voices that are sincere and searching: "Can we talk?"

My work as a college chaplain puts me in a good place to have a lot of Christian conversations. Sometimes conversations are spontaneous, when paths cross and a brief "hello" results in conversation. Sometimes a student will come by my office or will email me: "Can we talk?"

The spiritual practice of Christian conversation takes place when two or more Christians intentionally discuss their faith and talk with one another about seeking wisdom and God's will. Christian conversation means that we are in fellowship with other Christians, supporting and praying for one another, listening to and learning from one another, as together we listen and learn from Christ.

Passageways for God's Love

John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, talked about "Christian conferencing." He explained that God has set up passageways so that God's love can be made known to us immediately. Prayer is one; another is reading the Bible. When John Wesley added Christian conferencing to his list of holy habits through which God can quickly get into the middle of our lives, he wanted us to remember that we can't be faithful alone.

Living the Christian life *together* is important. God's grace, God's unconditional love for us, can flow through the passageways more easily when we practice our spirituality with other people. We grow when, with other Christians, we listen for God's voice and God's direction.

Christians should learn how to have Christian conversations. We should practice carefully watching over one another in love. We can do that by agreeing to support one another and to hold one another accountable for the ways we strive to be like Jesus. When we practice Christian conversation, we discover ways to grow in our love of God, neighbors, and one another.

WEEK FIVE • DAY FOUR

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Dig Deeper

Think of a hot topic or a question about God that you want to understand better. Gather together a small group of Christian friends. Remind them that Christian conversation involves

- discussing thoughts and feelings,
- listening with the heart,
- praying to hear God in the conversation,
- supporting one another,
- being trustworthy and responsible.

Begin the conversation with silence or prayer. Pray that God's light will shine in the discussion so that everyone will learn God's ways.

Try letting one person talk without interruption for five minutes. Silence is OK. Remember that the group is listening for God's word. When five minutes have passed, invite people to ask questions that help clarify what they have heard. Take turns talking and listening.

Afterward, talk together about the experience. What was surprising? puzzling? disappointing? challenging? intriguing? inspirational? What helped you to know God and to grow in faith?

WEEK FIVE • DAY FIVE

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

[FEBRUARY 10-16]

+real talk

“Don’t worry about what you’ll say or how you’ll say it. The right words will be there; the Spirit of your Father will supply the words.”

Matthew 10:19-20 (*The Message*)

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS **10**

Olivia Connolly, 22 [Glen Arm, Maryland]

Being a Christian, I hold beliefs that don’t always align with those of my friends. This can be intimidating, but we are called to be a light. So how can we engage in conversations about real stuff?

Instead of avoiding difficult conversations, we can speak words of life and love. We may feel that we don’t have all the right words, but the Spirit promises to help us in those moments. If we can communicate our love by listening and empathizing, our friends might be more willing to talk to us about problems they are facing in their classes, families, or relationships. Although we might not make the same decisions they do in these situations, our caring response might open up further opportunities to discuss difficult topics. <



Speak Life: When confronted with a potentially uncomfortable conversation, say a quick prayer to ask God for help in communicating love to your friends.



Listen to “Speak Life” by TobyMac at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeBv9r92VQ0

44 JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2020

www.devozine.org

WEEK FIVE • DAY SIX

CONNECTING WITH GOD AND OTHERS

Finding God in Solitude and Quiet

Helen R. Neinast and Thomas C. Ettinger

There is a sacred simplicity in not doing something—and not doing it well.
—Robert Fulghum, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*

“Inside yourself, you shouldn’t be running all the time.” That’s Tina Turner, rock superstar, quoting a Trappist monk. Both Turner, a practicing Buddhist, and the monk, a practicing Catholic, had one very basic belief in common: It takes time and solitude and a sense of quiet in order to know God.



“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10, NIV). A simple verse from the Bible, yet it is one of the hardest to follow.

When was the last time you sat still—perfectly still—for any length of time? Not just your body, but your mind? It’s harder than it sounds . . . harder than it looks . . . and more rewarding than you could ever imagine.

God reaches out to each one of us, all the time—through other people, through circumstance, and in that “still, small voice.” Most of the time, though, we’re so busy, so active, so preoccupied that we don’t hear what God is trying to say.

That’s why quiet and solitude are such an important part of the life of faith. It is in solitude and silence that God waits for you. The more often you practice solitude, the more often you will find the God who waits, and the more you will hear the God who speaks.

To quiet the body, to quiet the mind, to sit still and do nothing. Author Robert Fulghum senses the power of sitting still. In fact, he humorously suggests that a new religion could be based on this act. To belong would involve simply sitting still for fifteen minutes a day. “Amazing things might happen if enough people did this on a regular basis,” he says. “Every chair, park bench, and sofa would become a church.”

Quiet the body. Quiet the mind. Be still. Amazing things may happen. Just try it and see.

Dig Deeper

“Be still, and know that I am God.”
—Psalm 46:10a, NIV

“There is a sacred simplicity in not doing something—and not doing it well.”
—Robert Fulghum

Is it hard for you to just “be still”? This week, park yourself somewhere for 15 minutes each day and just be still. At the end of the week, write about these experiences in your journal.

Excerpted from *What About God? Now That You’re Off to College*. Copyright © 1992 by Helen R. Neinast and Thomas C. Ettinger. Used with permission of Upper Room Books. All Rights Reserved.

WEEK FIVE • DAY SEVEN

CONNECTING WITH GOD AND OTHERS

I AM BELOVED

WEEKEND!

WILL PENNER  27

BE LOVED

Just before Jesus entered his public ministry, two major events occurred: (1) He was baptized in the Jordan river, and (2) he was tempted in the wilderness. Mark 1:9–11 describes the moment of Jesus' baptism, when a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NRSV). What a beautiful scene! Imagine the Creator's voice, booming out with pleasure and calling Jesus "beloved."

Romans 8:16–17 (NRSV) says that you and I are "children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." An heir is someone who is entitled to all the rights, privileges, property, power, and titles given to another. A king, for instance, might pass on to his oldest son the authority to rule as king. Romans tells us that we have been adopted into God's family and share the inheritance Jesus receives as God's son.

 28 **NEXT DAY STRETCH**

Christmas is the time of year to celebrate Jesus' birth. It's also a time for people to sell us stuff, often through advertising that attacks our self-esteem. It's a time when we feel

60 NOV>DEC 2014

december 22–28

WEEK FIVE • DAY SEVEN

CONNECTING WITH GOD AND OTHERS

I AM BELOVED

WEEKEND!

Therefore, we are all God's beloved. Rather than relating to us merely as Creator to creature, God chooses to relate to us as parent to child. We are God's precious children. As sons and daughters of the king of kings, we, like Jesus, are princes and princesses of the kingdom of heaven. That's good news!

At his baptism, Jesus was named God's beloved; and immediately he was "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Matthew 4:1, NRSV), where he was tempted to define himself by worldly standards. None of the temptations was intrinsically bad; but they were all ways to satisfy longings that have nothing to do with God. (Read Matthew 4:1-11.)

Our culture bombards us with tempting ways to define ourselves: beauty, athletic ability, academic achievement, wealth, fame, number of Twitter followers, girlfriend or boyfriend. None is inherently bad, until we use it to define our worth. The truth is that we are never going to be good enough, smart enough, funny enough, rich enough, or cool enough to meet every expectation our culture sets. Jesus rejected worldly ways of defining himself because he accepted being God's beloved. If we do the same, we can battle our own voices in the wilderness.

Perhaps we can think of the word *beloved* not as a title but as a command. God says, "Be loved." God loves us and desperately wants us to know how much we are loved. We can't earn it, and we have no choice in the matter. We are loved. Therefore, we should recognize it: *Be loved*. If we took this admonition as seriously as The Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule, how would our lives be different? *Be loved*. How much spiritual armor would protect us from the voices that try to define us in ways that tear us down? The Spirit is prompting us to hear: "You are my beloved child. With you, I am well pleased." Listen, and be loved. <

Will Penner, from Fairview, Tennessee, has been leading retreats for more than a decade to help young people recognize that they are precious, beloved children of God.

pressured to get along with family members. Some people measure their worth by how many presents they get or are able to give. But God has already measured your worth:

You are loved. God loved you enough to leave the perfect bliss of heaven and to be born as a poor country kid in a stable. During this season, take note of cultural and even

Christian messages that say, "You're not good enough unless . . ." Then remember God's command that was first spoken to Jesus and through Jesus to us: Be loved.

www.devozine.org

NOV>DEC 2014 **61**