



Faith In Action Series:

Thoughts and devotions written by the younger generation of our denomination and their leaders

Stories of Growing in Grace

Week 1

June 1

What is “Faith in Action”?

Miss Elinor Griffin

Outreach North America

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, ESV)

We are daily faced with the brokenness of the world in which we live and the painful reality of the effects of sin within ourselves, relationships, communities, social structures, and ideologies. Romans 8 says that the creation itself groans because of sin and its deadly consequences. Through technology, our world is more connected now than ever before, and like it or not, we have a front row seat to the suffering of an entire world that desperately needs Christ to transform it from the inside-out. William Wilberforce, the devoted Christian and passionate abolitionist, understood our human temptation to run from the fray when he said, “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.” He understood that as followers of the risen Christ, we are called to put our faith in action as we run after Him, even - especially - in the face of spiritual darkness, human suffering, oppression, and need.

So what? After we learn about great needs throughout the world...then what? What's the alternative, if running away is not an option? Dr. Steve Garber wrestles with this question in his book, *Visions of Vocation*, when he asks, "Can you know the world and still love it?" In other words, when we are faced with the ugly messiness of this broken life, will we run away from it and choose not to care? Or will we follow the steps of our Savior who deliberately walked into the heart of human sin *and* suffering in order to bring us life? Thankfully, the redemption of the creation and even ourselves is not up to us; "There's only one Savior, and you're not Him," my parents always tell me. Praise Him for that! But the God who saved us out of darkness is in the business of fixing broken things, and He delights in using His people to further His work and His Kingdom on this earth. (John 20:21b) He calls us to pursue Him wholeheartedly and to mirror His just and merciful restoration in our earthly endeavors as we look to Him who is the Author and Perfector of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2)

Each day in the month of June, Outreach North America will be sharing a variety of stories from ARP high schoolers, college students, and their leaders who are learning (and teaching) what it means to engage in the hard work of living out their faith in a broken world. From Camp Joy to international mission trips to living as a Christian on a secular campus, our students have much to teach us about "doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). As you read their stories, I ask you to do two things. First, *will you pray earnestly and specifically for the youth of the ARP Church?* Pray for their spiritual growth and protection. Pray that they will always rest in the simple, earth-changing reality of the Gospel of Christ - that "we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." (Tim Keller) Second, *would you ask earnestly and specifically how the Lord is (not "if!") calling you to put your faith into action in your community and daily life?* As we thank the Lord for His covenant faithfulness to His people and as we seek His face and rest in Him, we pray that He will lead us "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

Father, may the world we live in come to know the saving grace and restoration that is found in Jesus Christ, and may You use us to display that grace more and more.

June 2

Daniel Turner

George Washington University

One of the best pieces of advice I have heard concerning the cause of justice was from Bryan Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. During an event about the criminal justice system in America he said, "You cannot advance justice without doing the uncomfortable." I found this to be a powerful truth and one that can easily be witnessed in the life of Jesus.

There are so many examples of Jesus doing what is uncomfortable in order to do what is right.

Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman at the well, something that most Jewish people would never do. Jesus spent time with the undesirables and the tax collectors, the outcasts of society, all in order to show His love. And Christ has called us to behave in the same way.

Having grown up in Turkey, I have experienced what it means to be uncomfortable. It's not always comfortable to be a Christian in a majority Muslim country. It's also not comfortable to have to adapt to the culture of another people. I remember the long visits with Turkish neighbors that would seem to drag on for hours, late into the night. I remember thinking, "Why can't this visit just be over?" as they brought out the next round of tea. But, looking back, I see how God uses his people in these uncomfortable moments to show his mercy to the lost and to give strength to the oppressed. I know that thanks to those many long hours my parents spent drinking tea with Turkish friends, some have come to Christ.

During other long visits, I have also heard some of the most amazing stories of faith from Iranian refugee friends. However, it isn't just when we travel to another country that we should enter uncomfortable situations. We have to be willing to get uncomfortable in our own communities. This year I had the great opportunity of doing a job shadow with the Richland County Public Defender Office, a place where those who can't afford representation receive legal counsel. Here I saw people who cared for and stood up for the oppressed. I saw people who were taking part in the suffering of the distressed. I saw people willing to get uncomfortable. One way we actively live out our faith is by speaking out and standing up for the oppressed, even when it puts us in uncomfortable situations. In the words of Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

June 3

Rev. Bob Elliott

Edgemoor ARP Church, Edgemoor, SC

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The youth group had a good many young boys who could be described as rowdy. To say ministry to this group was a challenge is an understatement. But the work continued. There were weekly Bible studies, youth group outings, trips to Bonclarken, love given, and life altering tragedies to work through. There were fun times and times where discipline needed to be administered. Time marches on. Those middle school boys became high school boys, and new found freedom brought them to youth group less frequently; it became more challenging to maintain the relationships that are so important in student ministry. At the same time, the Lord

called me to a new ministry at a different church in another state. I left my ministry unsure of whether or not the Lord had used me to make a difference in the lives of those boys and unsure where the boys stood in their relationship with the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Several years later, I had the honor of serving as the minister at Camp Joy at Bonclarken. Imagine my surprise to see several of those same boys on the list counselors that week. I have to admit - I was doubtful that they were up to the level of commitment necessary to serve the Camp Joy campers. Through the week, it was a blessing to witness that these young men had matured and were giving of themselves to serve the needs of their "special friends." On the final night of camp, after the campers were in bed, there was a devotional for the staff in the chapel. After the devotional and a time of individual prayer, I was in the back of the chapel taking it all in. One of these boys came up to me and grabbed me in a bear hug while crying his eyes out. He told me, "I finally get it! I finally understand what everyone has been telling me."

God is faithful. He had been working in that young man's life from before He knit him in the womb. The Lord used family, friends, church family, pastors, volunteers, teachers and many others in the life of this young man. He used the staff of Camp Joy and that one particular camper for the week to finally bring to fruition this young man's salvation. God is also gracious. He allowed me to witness the work He was doing in the life of that rowdy middle school boy. He allowed me to be there when that young man accepted Christ as His personal Lord and Savior. He is now grown and married with his own children. I don't see him much, but I still keep up with him through his family. God is faithful.

June 4

Anna Helen Marshall

First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC

This past year has been one of the hardest years of my life, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I went through a painful breakup, depression and anxiety became constant companions, and I sustained two separate injuries back-to-back, one of which is still healing. All of this happened in a seven-month period. I felt like I was being knocked to the ground over and over again, unable ever to stand up completely straight. When life seemed to be getting a little bit better, something would come along and strike me down again. But with each "fall," I grew closer to God and realized how much I truly need Him in the good times and in the bad. God used each of my trials to bring me closer to Him and to help me realize that when all else fails me, He never will. When the things in this world that make me feel loved or happy disappear, I must remind myself that His love and the joy He brings is unconditional and it will never fade.

On one of my most miserable days, when I had been crying and was on the verge of having an anxiety attack, Matthew 11:28 came to my mind: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." So, that is what I did. I ran to the Lord in prayer because I had

never felt so anxious and completely alone before. 1 Peter 5:7 says to “cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” In that moment, God brought me not only emotional rest, but also physical rest; I fell asleep for two hours. When I woke up, the lyrics of “Blessings,” by Laura Story, were playing over and over in my mind:

'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise

God used those lyrics to remind me that something good would come out of my suffering and that he was going to make me stronger through it. I also learned to take my eyes off myself and my own brokenness and to fix them on Jesus and his perfection. It is so easy to become consumed by the trials and tribulations of the world, but when I am weak and I feel as if the weight of the world is pressing on my shoulders, God will be my strength. His love and grace covers a multitude of suffering. His plan is perfect, and even when I face trials, he is right there beside me and he will turn my brokenness into something beautiful.

June 5

“Keep Lasting Things First”

Mr. Bobby Duran

Erskine College Admissions Department

Recently, I asked myself a question about my Christian faith: If I really believe the things that I say I do, and that eternal things are eternal and that temporary things are temporary, then how would I live my life differently?

All too often I find myself living in the same ways that the world does. I chase the same pleasures and prestige that they do. I worry and stress about the same temporary things that they do. I know that treasures in heaven and human souls will last forever, and yet sometimes I live my life as if I am totally unaffected by that truth. Petty worldly things occupy so much of my time and talents, and often it comes at the expense of time spent on eternal things with lasting value.

In a disagreement or conflict, what is more important: winning an argument or the soul of the person with whom I am interacting? Is winning arguments more important than winning people over for Christ? Would I be willing to admit being wrong or to hold my tongue if it meant showing the love and grace that can transform lives?

In business, what do I communicate if I strive after results at the expense of coworkers, their families, or even my own family? Companies and institutions, even denominations of the

Church, come and go, but people are eternal. They will always exist. Will I choose to abuse what is eternal for the sake of something temporary? Examples abound of the everyday ways in which I am tempted to choose temporary satisfaction and earthly success over things that are of real eternal significance.

So the challenge, to myself and to anyone else who believes the things of Christ, is to ask that same question every day. How can I, in the way that I live my life, honor what God has made to last forever by prioritizing it above that which cannot, and will not, stand the test of time?

May God give grace to His people as we seek to do just that.

June 6

**Elizabeth Sims
Erskine College**

For as long as I can remember, I have known about or been involved with Camp Joy. When I was growing up, we always had individuals with special needs in our church. Every year they would talk about Camp Joy and how they couldn't wait to go back, and I knew I had to check out this special place. I have now worked two years at Camp Joy and will be working my third this summer.

People do not realize how much one week with a camper can impact and change your life forever. You learn many spiritual and life lessons while working at Camp Joy. It is not easy working with people who are different from you, especially those who work and process information at a different pace. It is especially hard when we live in a world where we can obtain anything we need at the snap of our fingers, so taking a week with your special friend and slowing down turns out to be one of the biggest blessings.

Another lesson that I learned at camp was patience. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit that I find personally challenging. I enjoy having things my way and on my time, but for this one week I had to put all of that aside and turn the focus away from me. I had to be patient in listening to my campers and helping their needs over mine. Through all of this I gained a greater perspective on not only them but also the world. Camp Joy has opened my eyes to see other people in need around me.

Camp Joy has also helped me appreciate life more. No matter what circumstances the campers come with, they are always so excited to be at camp and to be learning about God. I believe the most important aspect Camp Joy has helped me appreciate is the joy that is found in Christ. These campers have such a great joy and love for Jesus that is very impacting. They are not angry for the way they were created by God. They embrace who they are and praise him without a care in the world. They have taught me to live my life for the Lord and be grateful in

any situation because Christ is a better joy than anything this world can offer.

June 7

“Students Need Faithful Adults, a Faithful Church”

Mr. Brad Anderson

Director of Youth Ministry

First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC

One of my college classes on “marriage and family” instilled many important ideas and facts about family life, but one insight stands out to this day. Concerning family life and time together, quantity is quality. The more we are together, through good times and bad, the more we become a family. Shared experiences, and many of them, bring people together. Surely we all realize this within our own homes. The joy of a holiday celebration, family vacation, the pain of the passing of a loved one, and general family conflict test the resolve of our ties. Is this not also true for the community of those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Realizing this, we can encourage each other with the writer of Hebrews exhorting God’s people to “... consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...” (Hebrews 10: 23-25)

Our students live in a world where they are encouraged more and more to look to themselves for the right answers. Their value and identity (worldly speaking) is based on their own merits—their SAT scores, involvement in extracurriculars, social status, and even church involvement are things to be added to their college resume. Even in some of the “best” Christian kids, their identity can be wrapped up in what they know *about* God rather than actually *knowing* God. The way they live out their faith can be seen as more important than being wrapped in the grace of Jesus Christ. Oh, how Satan delights when a follower of Jesus loses sight of His grace and focuses on what one must *do* to live the Christian life rather than who one *is* in Jesus.

Our students need wise, faithful adults in their lives to encourage them to follow Christ and live by his grace. They need adults willing to give of their time and to share their lives. They need those followers of Christ who, for years, have relied on God’s promises to lead them; they need those who have had their ups and downs and remain clinging to the promises of His Word. They need adults who can graciously listen, talk, cry, and laugh with them as they attempt to make heads or tails of this life. They need adults who revel in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Our students need adults who will point them to Jesus Christ and away from themselves. Will you be one?