



### **Faith In Action Series:**

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

*Stories of Growing in Grace*

#### **Week 2**

**June 8**

**Mr. Christian May  
Tirzah ARP Church**

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*

When I dove into Micah 6:8 to fully understand it, I had two dilemmas. The first was that in my time as a member of the ARP church and the Church as a whole, I could not think of a time where I truly exercised living out this Scripture. The second was the fact that during my time of reflection, I could not think of any story to tell where I was cast in a positive light. However, what I did think of was a time when a group of people lived out the implications of this verse, and I was the recipient.

The year was 2017, and as the youth intern at Greenville ARP Church, I was on my way to the mountains of Tennessee to serve on the Appalachia Mission Trip. Everything in me said that going on the trip was a mistake. Going into that setting with that attitude created a spirit within me that caused me to close myself off from getting to know the beauty of the people living there and halted me from earnestly sharing the gospel with them. But the people at our host church, Speaks Chapel, do understand what it means to act justly and walk humbly with your God. They took me, the most obvious outsider, and adopted me into their culture and their families. They were gracious and humble, even when I did not expect them to be. This, to me, is what the picture of Micah 6:8 looks like. It looks like giving people, even those who seem undeserving, their dignity. It looks like living and acting in the commands of our God and King. It looks like taking ourselves off of the pedestal that we have created for ourselves so that we may be prepared to follow our God. This encounter changed my heart in many ways, but I can say that

the biggest impact was this: I realized that I am an unworthy recipient of mercy and faithfulness. The only response to that great gift that has any worth is to give the same in return.

**June 9**

**Dr. Brent Turner**

**Executive Director**

**Christian Education Ministries**

The first time I had the opportunity to serve as a counselor at Camp Joy, a special needs camp, it was an amazing and humbling opportunity. I wanted to experience the camp from a counselor's perspective, and I'm so grateful that I was able to do this. My eyes were opened to what it means to be put my own faith into action.

Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). The great King of Kings and Lord of Lords showed us a marvelous example of true service. This stands in stark contrast to the world we live in, where we hear, "Be all you can be" and "Because you're worth it." We take "selfies" and want people to know our accomplishments on social media. Children want to be at the front of the line, and for many children, one of their first words is, "mine."

When I first met my camper at Camp Joy, I thought to myself, "This could not be that hard," because I had a fairly easy camper who could take care of himself. I soon learned that that was simply not the case. After a few days, though, I realized that I was the one who was learning from my camper. He began to care and serve me, and he showed me what it was like to follow Jesus. His simple, childlike faith was such an example to me. I may have had all the Bible college and seminary knowledge, but he had the heart of Jesus. His great faith and love for Christ were evident as he sang, read his Bible, and served all of those around him.

I remember one particular time at camp when the rains poured down outside. This kept us inside where we ate supper, and because of the rain, we had to have our chapel time in the same place we ate supper. All the campers and counselors were sitting in their chairs as the staff worked hard to figure out what to do and how to change the schedule. Our worship leader decided to play some music while all the confusion was going on, and he began playing a few hymns as we waited. As the hymns played, we noticed the campers began to sing and worship. One camper stood to his feet and walked on stage. After the hymn, he looked out over the crowd and said, "God loves me, God loves you." Sermon preached!

Jesus showed us what it means to truly serve. He looked out not for His own interest, but for the interest of others. He showed us what it meant to serve and love unconditionally, and, like the campers at Camp Joy, we, too, should follow His example.

**June 10**

**Jon Oliphant**

**Pastoral Intern**

**First ARP Church Gastonia**

The call to put our faith into action is one of the most humbling, yet glorious, opportunities the Lord gives. The fact is, because Christ has fully paid for our sins and brought us into a right relationship with the Father, we are enabled to live out the hope of the gospel. This takes courage, but courage that comes not from us, but from the Holy Spirit.

One passage the Lord has laid on my heart recently regarding the call to pursue faithfulness is Philippians 2:3-4. Paul writes, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." A key component to living as God calls is dying to self and living for God and others. This involves setting aside our own agendas and seeking the best interests of people around us.

We need to be clear; this is not a flashy gig nor one that will make us famous. In fact, in some senses it is not even that radical. However, it is faithful - exactly what God desires (Matt. 25:23). Pastor Kevin DeYoung notes, "The best churches are full of gospel-saturated people holding tenaciously to a vision of godly obedience and God's glory, and pursuing that godliness and glory with relentless, often unnoticed, plodding consistency."

As a part of my seminary studies and ministry in the church, I have had the privilege of giving counsel to a variety of folks. These verses from Philippians 2 have been a passage I have turned to regularly to encourage people struggling to live as God calls. It has been a joy to see how commitment to the Lord through living out these verses has brought change to several of God's people.

Yet not only has this verse impacted me in ministry, but it has also shaped my everyday life. From the way I interact with my wife, to the way I strive to love those in our neighborhood who do not know Christ, the Lord has used these verses to remind me how I am to live. May the Lord remind you as well of the importance of counting others more than yourself and looking to their interests before your own. And may you do so for the glory of the God who made you and loves you.

**June 11**

**Jacob Thomas**

**Erskine College**

Christ calls us to live out our faith in Him so that His grace is experienced and displayed through our everyday lives. As fellow Christians, we are all called to live out our faith in a broken world. This presents many challenges, but as the testimonies of fellow believers show, the benefits can

be astronomical as well. As Christ begins to work within us, the characteristics of justice, mercy, and faithfulness begin to characterize our entire being.

I don't remember a time when I didn't love Jesus and didn't accept him as my Lord and Savior; however, learning to trust Him was a different matter. Growing up in a Christian household, I was taught the basics of faith early on. Going to church was a regular part of my routine, and while I easily acknowledged the importance of God in my life, I refused to completely surrender everything unto Him because I still wanted to be in control.

As a young child I suffered from anxiety. Throughout my life, this anxiety has taken different forms and appeared as both a fear of failure and a fear of unacceptance. Kindled by my perfectionist personality, this fear and anxiety prevented me from fully recognizing the love and acceptance God offered me. It took many years for me to realize that there is nothing I can do to make God love me more or less than He already does. Thankfully, God's mercy knows no bounds.

One definition of biblical mercy is "compassion shown toward an offender or enemy." (Merriam-Webster) I am well aware that both then and now, I have constantly struggled with giving God full reign of my life. My resistance to His will for my life has led to much heartache and sin. Yet through all of it, God has been by my side. By not letting me go, God has shown both His mercy and love. As Psalm 23:4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Despite all of my shortcomings, God has a plan for my life, and I take great comfort knowing that He will never leave my side. Simply knowing that the God of the universe is constantly by my side gives me the courage I need to reach out of my comfort zone and help others as I pursue justice, mercy, and faithfulness as a follower of Christ.

**June 12**  
**Jackson Lyda**  
**Covenant College**  
**(Greenville ARP Church)**

How often do we associate true, unhindered joy with our worship? Often times we overlook the jubilant predilection of what we do every Sunday and hopefully every day in between, but the essence of worship is true, unfettered joy in the Gospel. Thankfully, I've had the privilege to work somewhere where joyful worship is nearly constant.

This place is appropriately named Camp Joy. Campers at Camp Joy are individuals, each with their own array of talents. While the world may consider them lesser, they are able to truly shine when involved in worship. Every worship service begins with a series of songs that a lot might consider simple. The Bonclarken chapel fills with the sound of singing that is borderline shouting as each camper puts their whole self into singing every word of the simple camp songs. One camper in particular sings loudly, epitomizing 'making a joyful noise'. (Psalm 98:4) You can hear

in the way he sings that he believes the redemptive truths in every song. Reading Scripture is also met with eagerness from campers, and praying aloud and publically is met with unparalleled zeal. There is one camper who always volunteers to pray, and he makes sure no blessing or gift is not accounted for. He is so happy to have the ability to talk directly to God, in a way I have scarcely witnessed anywhere else. But most of all, in any Camp Joy worship service, there is an understanding for many campers that their worship is a microcosm of heaven. My special friend this past year embodied this understanding. He is essentially paralyzed, and it's difficult for him to speak, much less sing. But every opportunity he gets he reminds you that his condition on this earth is temporary, and in heaven he will be able to 'love God like everyone does here' (his words, not mine). My special friend's heavenly-mindedness creates a joy that transcends his struggles on this earth. Every year he takes the stage at the Camp Joy talent show to sing "I Can Only Imagine," and it never fails to move the counselors to tears.

It is this joy that makes Camp Joy not only a place for people like me to witness to those with special needs, but to be witnessed to a little bit myself - witnessed to about how I can better glorify my heavenly Father, about how to better use my talents, about being joyful in any situation. We can all benefit from singing a little more boldly, being more excited to delve into Scripture, and being more ready to pray. And of course, we can all grow ourselves tremendously by adopting a jubilant and heavenly-minded attitude. This is why Camp Joy matters so much to me and why I will continue to come back for as long as I possibly can.

**June 13**

**Jordan Berkhouse**

**Oklahoma University**

I am currently a student at Oklahoma University Law and surrounded by students from all different backgrounds, with every kind of ambition one might expect in a room full of future lawyers: wealth, status, reform, justice and more. What has been surprising is the varying degree of response people have to discussions of faith in this environment. Some are staunch supporters of their interpretation of separation of church and state— "You keep your church away from my state." Others feel a deep need to explore and understand the intersection of faith and law while being sensitive to the multiperspectivalism so deeply ingrained in our culture. Knowing when to speak words of truth in order to help those who desperately seek it, while at the same time being able to engage with others who are ardently opposed to the truth has been a challenge.

Expressing an intellectual faith and not being overly combative has proven to be an effective strategy for me to at least open the door for discussion with those that oppose the Word of God. Many have simply never had a two-sided conversation with someone who holds an opposing viewpoint, let alone with someone who has mixed compassion with intellectual faith. Most have remained in their respective silos repeating and propagating the only worldview they have ever known. Others are combative at first due to bad experiences with faith, but nevertheless tend to respond well to respectful and thought-provoking discussions.

For those that are eagerly seeking the truth, a Bible study designed specifically for them and their peers has been met with shocking interest. Many students are excited to be taught and to discuss with one another what the Scriptures have to say about life as a proponent of justice. It has been so encouraging to see their faith in Christ come alive when they recognize that they are not alone in their faith and that Scripture does, in fact, have so much to say about the path which God has laid out in front of them.

Pursuing justice, mercy, and faithfulness in a potentially hostile environment can be challenging. However, the Lord has been faithful in providing ways to speak truth to those whom He has called and at the same time giving opportunities to discuss the true nature of justice, mercy, and faith with those that might otherwise wage war against them.

**June 14**

**Joseph Painter**

**Appalachia State University**

Going to camp in the summers has always been the highlight of my year. I think specifically of attending Quest and Horizon growing up and how influential those times were for the development of my relationship with Jesus. Every year I benefited from the leaders pouring into me, the large group sessions, and the nightly “family time” as a church group. I attended camps at Bonclarken every summer until I went to college. After my first year in college, I took a job working as a counselor at Camp Winshape in Georgia. Camp Winshape’s mission is to influence the lives of campers and their families with the message of Jesus Christ. I spent every day building relationships with campers, teaching skills like swimming and ultimate frisbee, and leading cabin devotions at night.

As I reflect on last summer, it was a time of great growth in my faith. Yes, camp is so much fun, but the campers who attend and become a huge part of your life are all broken and hurt in some way by the imperfect world in which we live. They have messy home lives, broken friendships, and behavior issues that stem, in part, from a deep desire to be loved and heard. The Lord led me to pursue justice, mercy, and faithfulness as I had one-on-one conversations with my campers about their lives. I watched middle school boys weep as they realized how their sin was an affront to God, and I saw those same boys burst with excitement as they learned about the grace that God has for them.

Last summer taught me that our lives here on earth are hard. The temptation to be self-consumed and buy into the pleasures that distract from the reality of sin seem to be more and more present. Yet, it also taught me just how sweet it is to follow the Lord. Along the way there is unmatched joy, genuine relationships, and conversations that scream of God’s love for His people. I am filled, not with fear, but hope as I press on to follow the Lord and love His people well.