

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, my God. Amen.

“Loving God means keeping his commandments, and really that isn’t hard.”

Wow. The apostle John tells us like it is: keeping God’s commandments is not a hard task. For “the law itself is holy, right, and good” (Romans 7:12). The Ten Commandments are not Ten Suggestions, Ten Really Good Ideas, or Ten Things You Might Want to Follow, If It Interests You. They are Commandments. According to the dictionary, a command is: an act of ordering; or an order given by one in authority. God, the one true authority in our lives, gave us these rules so that our ancestors would stop sinning. These commandments are similar to driving laws --- driving laws limit the amount of decisions you have to make daily while driving: you always drive on the right side of the road; there is a speed limit, and various other rules. These laws protect us while we’re driving, just as the commandments allow us to be protected by God. When you follow the commandments that God has given, Exodus 20:12 says you will live a long, full life. Therefore, by ignoring these “easy” commandments, we consciously take time off of our lives.

Jesus commands us to love each other, for “the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends.” Although sacrificing our lives for others is not an opportunity we all have every day, Jesus doesn’t mean just our lives. In fact, he also means the smallest of gestures: such as sharing a smile or opening a door, to something that is not as easy to fit into our daily, hectic schedules: such as driving a friend to the airport or visiting someone in the hospital.

Not only should we follow God's commandments and Jesus' teachings, we must also trust that God will keep us safe and give us the tools necessary to fight our personal battles against evil. When we trust God, we acknowledge his power, that he is the key to our success, and that His plans for us will not fail, although we might not always be happy where our path of life takes us.

I just finished my freshman year in a college where I was six hours away from home. With no car, only one person from my high school at Auburn, I felt lost, alone, and confused, surrounded by thousands of people. I was literally calling my mother every second I could to talk to her and feel like I was home. I was dragging my feet along my little path of existence as God was trying to show me how amazing my life really was. One night, after experiencing one of the worst bouts of homesickness I have ever had, I opened my bible. Lo and behold, it opened to Jeremiah 29. It was literally a God-send. I read chapter 29, and stopped when I got to verse 11. I know what Jeremiah 29:11 is, yet I never honestly stopped to think about how the words applied to me before that day. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." The chapter continues with: "In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me."

"For I know the plans I have for you." "Plans for good and not for disaster." I read those words, and was immediately placed in awe and humbled. Here I was, complaining about how far from home I was, that I was missing the point of it all. I was surrounded by awesome people in a beautiful place! I had respectable teachers, a place to live, a meal plan, and the freedom to come and go as I pleased. My roommate, my suitemates, my sorority sisters, and my classmates: they

were all potential friends that at the time I was not interested in, for I believed that I was not in the right place. Although my devotional book says: “If God puts you there, He is simply sufficient,” I had stopped trusting that God knew what was best in my life, and I stopped obeying Him.

Jesus said “When you obey me, you remain in my love.”

In English, there is one word for love. In French, there is one, Spanish one, Italian one, and Greek: 4.

In Greek, the language in which the Bible was written, the words for love are: agape, philia, eros, and storge. Agape means the divine love of God or God’s love for humanity. God’s love is unwavering, unending, unconditional. Paul writes in Romans 8, verse 38-39: “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from His love. Death can’t, and life can’t. The angels can’t, and the demons can’t. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can’t keep God’s love away.”

Death cannot separate us from God’s love. Nothing, not our jobs, not our current financial crisis, nothing, can keep us from His love. We need to remind ourselves of that every day. That no matter what we do, no matter where we are in our lives, or what situations we have gotten ourselves into, NOTHING can take away God’s love for us.

This is the kind of love that Jesus Christ wants us to show towards our friends when he says “Love one another as I have loved you.” Although we cannot come even close to perfectly loving as God loves us, Jesus wants us to use the image of God’s perfect love as an example for how we should love one another. A forgiving love is not easy. In fact, there are few people in this world who come close. In the adapted version for students of Oswald Chamber’s: My

Utmost for His Highest, the compiler Stephen Case makes the following statement: “It’s hard to imagine that we have to love those who go out of their way to make our lives miserable. It’s not easy. Jesus didn’t say it would be.” Although this command from Jesus will not be a simple one to follow, Christ should be an example to us, as he loved even those who nailed him to the cross.

In *The Message*, a version of the translated Bible by Eugene Peterson, John 15:17 is read as: “But remember the root command: Love one another.” The word root brings up the image of a garden, with trees and plants and vines; bringing us to last week’s reading: “Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches.” We bear fruit because we believe, and this fruit comes from the way we carry ourselves and show that we are Christian. The word root carries also an image of a great tree, hundreds of years old, with branches extending upwards beyond our imagination. This full, green, luscious tree is made up of Christians like you and I. But when we break off from our true path, we cause a branch to wither, and to therefore be cut from the tree of Christ.

Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Not Taken* discusses coming to a fork in the road, and having to choose which path to go on. He looks down both paths, trying to see as far as he can, but there is a bend in each path, blocking his view. Frost ends the poem with:

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.”

To me, this verse means, although I didn’t do what was popular, I followed my faith. Although not always the most traveled path, if we stay true to our faith and trust in God, he will lead us to the path that will give us the most success.

As we celebrate our graduating seniors this Sunday, I feel the need to impart some words of wisdom as they continue their life journey in new places:

never be afraid to ask questions,

you never know where you'll meet your best friends, so always be yourself

don't forget to call your parents --- they will miss you, even if you're having too much fun to remember to miss them.

And finally: remember to stay true to yourself! Because you were perfectly and wonderfully made by God as you are.