

O-Week Devotionals

9/25-10/1

UChicago Asian American
InterVarsity



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Introduction: Let Knowledge Grow

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

Matthew 22:37–38, NIV

Welcome to UChicago! Whether you're settling into your dorm room or staying at home, there's no better time than now to invite God into the beginning of your college career.

Crescat scientia; vita excolatur. Our motto translates to "Let knowledge grow from more to more; and so be human life enriched." The first part of this translation actually comes from a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

*We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.*

*Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before...*

Knowledge and reverence. Mind and soul. Together, knowledge and faith work to build upon one another, each one growing as the other grows.

Sometimes, it's easy for us to separate our faith and our academics. We forget that God is the one who gave us these big brains in the first place. We forget that when we study biology and physics, we study God's creation. That when we talk about literature and philosophy, we're examining the works and thoughts of other humans, other images of God.

But when we remember these things, it's exciting stuff! Sure, studying is still work, but ultimately it's a part of our individual faith journeys. We can offer our studies to God and love Him with not only our hearts and souls but also our *minds*.

What does it look like to follow God in our schoolwork? Many of us probably come from backgrounds where we were pushed, whether by our parents or by ourselves, to work hard, do all the extracurriculars, and get good grades. In a high-achieving environment like UChicago, it is especially easy for our lives to begin revolving solely around our studies; we start working non-stop, using our grades and internship offers as the sole measure of our success and self-worth.

But what would happen if we put God at the center of our studies? What if we saw our studies as a way to worship God and get to know Him better? How might the culture of our campus be transformed if Christ-following students began to see school as a source of joy, not stress?

It starts with spending time with God. Through these devotionals, we want to give you some prayer tools to help you rest in God's love and grow closer to him. Each day will be a different type of prayer, and each prayer will have a theme of rest or identity to help you reflect on the following ideas:

I am not meant to work non-stop. How can I learn to rest in God's love?

I am not defined by my grades. Who does God say I am?

Our hope is that you would be encouraged and refreshed as we begin the school year, and that these would be helpful practices that you can continue throughout the year. Set aside 20 minutes every day and let God meet you where you're at. Remember, these take practice! Don't be discouraged if a prayer doesn't seem to click with you; the important thing is that you are spending time with God.

We are also made for community, and we're not meant to walk through college alone! Find out more about AAIV at the end of this booklet, and please reach out to us [here](#). We would love to meet you!

Let knowledge grow from more to more; and so be your faith enriched.

9/25: Prayer as Conversation

We are in a relationship with a God who loves us and cares about us. There's no relationship without communication! When we pray, it can be as simple as just talking to God, telling him what's on our mind, and then quieting ourselves and listening to how he might be speaking and responding to us.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Set aside 10 minutes. Using a timer might be helpful.
3. Start by acknowledging who God is and who you are:
 - Praise God for who he is. Think about his character, his power, his love, his mighty acts.
 - Admit how you have acted, spoken, or thought from a place not of love. Ask for God's forgiveness.
 - Thank God for what he has done in your life and other things you are grateful for.
4. Talk to God. Tell him what's on your mind. Talk to him like you would a friend, a parent, or someone you trust. God wants to hear from you. He wants to hear your wants, hurts, anxieties, anger, sadness, and he also wants to hear your joys, excitement, hopes, and dreams.
5. Set aside 5 more minutes to listen to God.
 - Ask him a question. Maybe you have to make an important decision that you want to ask God about. Maybe it's simply "What do you want me to do today?"
 - Listen for God's voice. He may speak to you through a verse that comes to mind, through a song, picture, sound, smell, or impression. If you keep getting distracted or feel like you don't hear anything, don't worry! It takes practice.
 - If you heard God speak, thank him for what he revealed to you. If you did not, thank him anyway for his attention.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- How would you describe your relationship with God?
- How do you feel after talking to God? How do you usually pray?
- Did you hear anything from God? How might God be speaking into your life?

9/26: Centering Prayer

Adapted from [*Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*](#) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

When we practice centering prayer, we sit and rest with God, giving him our undivided attention. If you find yourself struggling to just sit quietly, that's okay! Again, this is to help you practice resting in God and spending time with him. The more you practice resting in God, the more you will find yourself centered in God during the rest of your day.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Choose a word or phrase from Scripture that will help you focus your attention on God.
Ex. Ancient of Days, Creator, Father, King, Lord, Prince of Peace, Redeemer, Shepherd
3. Set aside 15 minutes.
4. Take time to become quiet. Don't worry if the first few minutes are filled with thoughts. Return your attention to the center of God's presence and love by repeating your centering word. Here are some images that can help refocus your attention as well:
 - Imagine a river. Deep down, the river is calm and slow, but the surface is covered in debris. Imagine your distracting thoughts are part of the debris rushing away in the current; let the distractions go with the river while you return to Jesus.
 - Imagine you're talking with a friend in a busy area (pre-COVID of course!). You're aware of the other sounds, but your attention is devoted to your friend. As you meet with Jesus, acknowledge the distractions but continue to return to him.
5. Rest in God's love.
6. Take your time coming out of prayer. Ask God to stay with you as you continue your day.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- What was it like to spend time with God without speaking to him?
- What do you notice about yourself when you are quiet with God?
- How can you continue to center yourself in God throughout the day?

9/27: Praying Scripture

Our prayers, like the rest of our lives, should be shaped by God's word. By praying from the Bible, we can keep our prayers in line with Scripture and better get to know both God and ourselves.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Set aside 15 minutes.
3. Make these words from Psalm 139 your own as you offer them to God:

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18, 22–23, NIV

4. Is there any phrase or idea in this Psalm that particularly resonates with you? Focus on that phrase and elaborate on it as you pray. For example, if the phrase that sticks out to you is "your works are wonderful, I know that full well," you might continue praising God for his works in your life, or you might ask God to help you see that his works are wonderful.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- How does it feel to let God's word guide your prayer?
- Have you gained any new insights into God's character from praying these words?

9/28: Visio Divina

We can connect to God through more ways than just words! When we practice Visio Divina, or "divine seeing," we use images to prompt our time of prayer and see what God might be drawing our attention to.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Set aside 15 minutes.
3. Ask God to enter into this time with you. Ask him to speak to you through this image.
4. Look at the picture on the next page. What part of the picture stands out to you or particularly draws your eyes? What words, emotions, ideas, or images comes to mind when you look at that part? What comes to mind when you look at the picture as a whole?
5. Respond to God by praying through the words, emotions, etc. that may have come to mind.
6. Thank God for being with you during this time.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- How does it feel to use an image to prompt your prayer?
- Do you sense an invitation from God?
- Have you learned anything about God? About yourself?



9/29: Prayer of Recollection

Adapted from [*Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*](#) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

We are distracted people, scattered between a million different things that we're paying attention to—especially once school starts! Our distractions can help reveal our attachments, the things that are taking priority in our minds instead of God. Through prayer of recollection, we can "recollect" ourselves, identifying our attachments and returning to our true identity in God.

1. Find a comfortable position, and have a notebook or piece of paper in front of you.
2. Set aside 20 minutes.
3. Relax your body and quiet your mind. Take some deep breaths. Try to slow down and let your body unwind.
4. Offer yourself to God. Ask him to gather up the fragments of your life and bring you back to himself. Rest before him.
5. When distracting thoughts come up, write down a word or phrase to express your distraction, then let the thought go, and return to resting in God.
6. After 10 minutes, look at the words you've written down. Take 5 minutes to answer these reflection questions:
 - What stands out to you? What anxieties do you see? What themes do you see? Where is your identity centered? What do these distractions reveal about your core identity and concerns?
7. Take 5 minutes to offer these distractions and concerns to God. Confess how these are things that can and/or have become more important than God in your life, and ask God again to help you find your identity in him.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- What have you learned about yourself and the things that are on your mind?
- How can you start letting go of some of your attachments and put God first?

9/30: Praying through Song

Praying with music can help us connect to God in a different way than with spoken words. In the Bible, people sing to God all the time, and the book of Psalms is composed entirely of songs.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Listen to "Be Thou My Vision" (Elenyi) [here](#). If you want, you can follow along with the lyrics below. As you listen and/or read, pay attention to the words and lift them up to God. Make this your own prayer:

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art

High King of Heaven, my victory won
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'n's Sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all

Be Thou my Vision

3. Do any of the verses stick out to you? Feel free to repeat them and talk to God about whatever thoughts they might bring up.
4. When you are ready to move on, listen to "You Are My Vision" (Rend Collective). [Here](#) is a video with lyrics, or [here](#) is the Spotify link; if you want, you can follow along with the lyrics below. Again, make these words a prayer to God:

You are my vision, O King of my heart
Nothing else satisfies, only You Lord

You are my best thought by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Your presence my light

You are my wisdom, You are my true word
I ever with You, and You with me Lord
You're my great Father, and I'm Your true son
You dwell inside me, together we're one

You are my battle-shield, sword for the fight
You are my dignity, You're my delight
You're my soul's shelter and You're my high tower
Come raise me heavenward, O power of my power

I don't want riches or man's empty praise
You're my inheritance, now and always
You and You only, the first in my heart
High king of Heaven, my treasure You are

High King of Heaven, when victory's won
May I reach Heaven's joy, O bright Heaven's Son
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

5. Again, if any verse or phrase sticks out to you, spend time with those words and lift them up to God along with your accompanying emotions or thoughts.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- How often do you listen to music? How often do you worship God through music?
- Do you usually think of singing worship songs as prayer? Do you usually pay attention to what the words are really saying?
- How does praying with music feel different than praying with written or spoken word?

10/1: Declaration

Declarations are statements from Scripture. Praying declarations can bring us encouragement and ground us in what we know to be true about God and ourselves.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Listen to this declaration from Oasis Church Chicago:
 - Go to the [Declarations page](#) on the Oasis website, scroll to the "God in Me" section and click on "Spiritual Strength." Here you can also find the original text.
 - Or listen on [Spotify](#).
3. Read the declaration aloud to yourself (slightly adapted from Oasis's version):

I am strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. I put on the full armor of God. In Christ I can do all things because He strengthens me. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults and with my song I shall thank Him. He is my strength and my saving defense in time of trouble.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with my spirit. I build myself up in my holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. As I do this, I keep myself strong in the love of God. My God keeps me from falling and presents me faultless and blameless in the presence of my heavenly Father with exceeding great joy.

My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not allow my foot to slip and He who keeps me will not slumber. The Lord is my keeper. The Lord is my shade on my right hand. The sun does not smite me by day nor the moon by night. The Lord protects me from all evil. He keeps my soul and He guards my going out and my coming in from this time forth and forever. When I pass through the valley of weeping, the Lord makes it a spring for me. I go from strength to strength in the Lord.

The Lord God is a sun and a shield to me. He gives me grace and glory, and no good thing does He withhold from me. I am blessed because I trust in Him. My heavenly Father grants unto me according to the riches of His glory the ability to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith, and that I, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all believers how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that I may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

I do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time I shall reap if I faint not. My eye is healthy, therefore my whole being is full of light. I am steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that my toil is not in vain in the Lord.

God is my strong fortress and He sets me in His way. By Him, I can run through a troop and by my God, I can leap over a wall. He is a shield because I take refuge in Him. He makes my feet like hinds' feet and sets me on my high places. He trains my hands for battle so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. He has given me the shield of His salvation, and His help and strength make me great. I pursue my enemies and destroy them because the Lord has girded me with strength for battle.

The Lord gives me strength when I am weary; and when I lack might, He increases power. I wait on the Lord and renew my strength. I mount up with wings like eagles. I run and do not get tired; I walk and do not faint.

Scriptural References Ephesians 3:16-19; 6:10; Philippians 4:13, 23; Psalm 28:7-8; 37:39; 84:5-7, 11; 121:1-8; 2 Samuel 22:30-40; Jude 20-21, 24; Galatians 6:7-9; Matthew 6:22; Isaiah 40:29-31; 1 Corinthians 15:58

4. Is there any particular part of the declaration that speaks to you today? Pray that part again, or as many times as you like, and spend 5 minutes offering this prayer to God.

Take 5 minutes to journal or think about these questions:

- How do you feel after hearing and saying this declaration?
- What part of the declaration particularly resonated with you?
- How might this declaration bring encouragement to you during the rest of your day?

About UChicago AIV

UChicago AIV invites you to come as you are and experience true rest in a genuine community that encourages one another to boldly follow Jesus in spreading God's love to our campus.

We strive to be a community of love, where Jesus is at the center of everything we do. AIV is a place where we can explore who Jesus is without any judgment or expectations and then challenge each other to take what we learn and follow Jesus in all aspects of our lives—whether in interactions with the people around us, in the way we approach our studies, or in our responses to injustice in our world.

Regardless of your ethnicity or faith background, we invite you to join us as we explore what it means to follow Jesus at UChicago!

How can I get connected?

- Fill out our [interest form](#).
- Check out our [events calendar](#).
- Check out our [bio link](#) for more info and ways to get involved!

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