

24 BRIEF DEVOTIONS

FOR

CLASSICAL CONVERSATIONS COMMUNITIES

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the CC community of which my family is currently a part, not only the Foundations parents and students but also all of our Challenge classes gather together for a brief (five minute) devotion and time of prayer before starting our Classical day. Our aim in these devotions is to reinforce from Scripture the Mission and Model of CC so that our families will grow in their commitment to this vision. We aim further to speak truths that will help cultivate community and encourage love among our families. Finally, as the year begins to wind down, we seek to draw the attention of both parents and students to encouragements from the Bible that will help them persevere and finish well.

My hope in making these devotions available to others is that CC directors far and wide might be encouraged to seize a few minutes each Classical day to speak God's truth to the parents and students in their communities. God's Word has an amazing ability (when blessed by the Spirit) to touch hearts and nourish God-centered vision, joy in learning, and peace in relationships. These devotions bear no remarkable qualities, and may not always be the best fit for your community. My desire, however, is that directors might find inspiration here to help them as they seek to speak into the lives of the families they serve.

Together, let's continue pursuing the great mission to know God and make Him known.

Soli Deo gloria!

Justin Nale

1. DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

As we begin this new CC year together, let me ask you a question. Why are you here? What are you hoping to accomplish over the next school year? What is the ultimate goal that you are aiming for?

Parents, I trust that you are here because you love your children and want to give them the best education you can. I trust that you are here because you have caught the vision of God-centered, classical based schooling. I trust that you have seen the value of homeschooling *in community* with others. Certainly one great goal you have is that your children will excel in knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

Students, why are you here? Are you here merely because your parents enrolled you in this program? Or are you here because you are on a mission to seize your education and to learn as much as you can while you are young? Are you hungry for knowledge? Are you eager to prepare yourself today for the future God has for you? Students, this is an amazing world we live in, and there is so much for us to explore and learn! Are you ready for a new year of learning?

Whatever our purposes and goals may be, the Bible teaches us that this goal must be ultimate: the glory of God. We are not to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. We are to see knowledge that we might better glorify God. We are not to educate our children for their sakes alone. We are to educate them for the glory of God. Indeed, everything we do as individuals, families, and as a CC community is to be done for the glory of God.

Why? Because He is worthy of our whole lives. He is worthy of all that we have to give – our full and utter devotion. He is worthy to be worshiped by us not only on Sundays, but every day, in every word we speak and every purpose we undertake. Therefore, as we begin this new year, let us begin by committing ourselves, our families, and this community to the glory of God. Let us lay ourselves upon the altar as a full and total sacrifice to God. Let us resolve right now, with dependence on God's grace, that we will do all that we do for the glory of God.

2. KNOWING GOD: THE HIGHEST PRIVILEGE

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."
(Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV)

This mission of Classical Conversations is to know God and to make Him known. As a CC community, all of us are now joined together in this important mission. It is a two-part mission. We seek to know God. We seek to make God known.

Don't make a mistake here. Don't assume that we somehow complete the first mission, and then move on to the second. Not at all. In this life (at least), we must never stop pursuing the knowledge of God. There is always more of Him to discover! There are always depths of our infinite God that we have yet to see, yet to adore, yet to enjoy. If we waited till we fully knew God to start making Him known, we would never begin the second part of our mission. Rather, we pursue both of these great goals simultaneously, each serving the other.

Our passage this morning highlights what an awesome privilege it is to know God. We are taught that knowing God is better than having human wisdom. Knowing God is better than having great might. Knowing God is better than having great riches. Put simply, there is nothing better in this world than knowing God.

Parents, here is a reminder to us of what we are aiming for in the education of our children. If our children know many, many wonderful facts about our world, but do not know about the God who governs this world, we have failed. If we give our children the best education possible according to worldly standards, but do not point our kids to the God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, we are not giving them the very best. We are under-serving them. Let us therefore resolve afresh this morning to point our children to God in every subject that we study.

Students, let me ask you this question: Do you have an eye for God in your studies? As you learn about God's world, do you ever take time to stop and just stand in wonder at His power, His wisdom, His creativity? A head full of knowledge can be a wonderful thing. But when that knowledge points you to God, and causes you to see Him, love Him, and adore Him, you have reached the heights of true education. Nothing compares with knowing God.

3. KNOWING GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

(John 1:17-18 ESV)

Let us be reminded again that our mission as a Classical Conversations community is to know God and to make Him known. How do we accomplish the first part of this mission? How do we come to know God?

Certainly we can learn about God from His creation. As we study our world, we are studying the very handiwork of God. As we study history, we are studying the providence of God. In every subject, we learn about our God.

We can also learn about God through His Word, the Bible. Only in the Bible do we learn the most important truths about God, the truths of the gospel. It is in the Bible that we learn how we can have peace with God and become His children.

Our passage this morning reminds of something vital. If we really want to know God, we must come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus came into the world, to make God known. Jesus is God, and yet is distinct from the Father; He is at the Father's side. Yet Jesus came into this world so that we who are cut off from God by our sins might know Him in a way that is otherwise impossible. Only through Jesus can we be reconciled to God and have peace with Him (cf. Rom 5:1).

Parents, make sure you get this. When we talk about pointing our children to God in every subject, we are not speaking about God in a generic sense. We aren't speaking about some vague deity up in the sky somewhere. We are speaking about the God who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. Point your children to God by pointing them to *Jesus*.

Students, make sure you remember that it was through *Jesus* that God created the world (cf. John 1:3), and that it is *Jesus* that rules over this world (cf. Rev. 5). When you are studying science, you are studying the handiwork of the Son of God. When you are learning about the rise and fall of kingdoms, great moments of human achievement, or terrible wars of the past, remember that Jesus is the Lord of history.

Above all, let us learn in every subject the wisdom, power, and goodness of Jesus Christ. Let us learn that He is worthy of our trust, worthy of our obedience, worthy of our lives.

4. MAKING GOD KNOWN: NOT ASHAMED

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
(Romans 1:16 ESV)

What is our mission as a Classical Conversations community? It is the same as the mission of our lives. It is to know God and to make God known.

One of the hindrances that keep us from making God known is shame. We are told by the world that we should be *embarrassed* by our Christian faith. Many are convinced that science has somehow disproven God and invalidated the Scriptures. Those who continue to cling to a biblical worldview are seen as out-of-touch with our modern age, uneducated, foolish and narrow-minded. According to our secular age, God is dead.

In reality, the Christian worldview is strong and able to ward off even the mightiest attacks brought against it. The Christian worldview is strong because it is *true*. If people were fair and balanced (which none of us are by nature), we would see that Christianity always wins the day in the battle of ideas. No other worldview comes close to giving satisfying answers to the most important questions of life. Even more importantly, no other worldview connects people to God and brings real peace and joy to the soul.

Parents, our children will not be inclined to make God known if they are ashamed of Him. Therefore, we must do all that we can to show our children the reasonableness of the Christian faith. Especially as they enter into that dialectic phase of development, we must engage with them about the worldviews of others, and offer to them good reasons why they should trust the God of their parents. There is a reason that we include in our curriculum instruction concerning Charles Darwin and evolutionary theory. There is a reason that our students read books from a non-Christian perspective like London's *The Call of the Wild* and Thoreau's *Walden*. As our students develop, we gradually expose them to competing worldviews while helping them to assess those worldviews from a Christian perspective. Above all, we want them to see that Christianity can not only compete but emerge victorious when set against the views of others.

Students, let us learn together that the Christian message (and especially the good news about Jesus) is a message of which we should never be ashamed. Instead, we should do all we can to prepare ourselves today to stand boldly before the world and speak the truth, calling all to know our amazing God.

5. MAKING GOD KNOWN THROUGH WORDS

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.
(1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

Our mission as a community is to know God and make Him known. The education that we are giving our children is intended to help accomplish this purpose. We want all of our CC students to be well-equipped to make God known to others in whatever callings God may place upon their lives.

This requires words. In our passage, we are told that we should always be prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in us. We are instructed to be ready to communicate to others with gentleness and respect why we have such great hope in our Lord.

Parents, here is one reason that we want to teach our students the skills of rhetoric. Whether they are giving presentations in Foundations classes or debating fellow students in Challenge classes, we are working to help our students speak confidently, persuasively, and lovingly to others. Today they may be speaking about their favorite toy in Foundations or their opinion on gun control in Challenge. But the skills they are learning now are intended to prepare them for the most important conversations of all – conversations about Christ and the truths of God.

Students, let me encourage you to seize your education for Jesus' sake. When you are being taught how to arrange an essay so that the arguments flow most smoothly, you are learning a skill that can be employed in the service of God. When you are battling with logic and trying to wrap your mind around syllogisms, remember that you are teaching your mind how to reason well so that you do exactly what God calls you to do in this passage: to give good reason for the hope that is in you.

Of course, it doesn't matter how skilled you are at reasoning, writing, or speaking if you don't have a hope in your heart worth defending. Therefore, let us look to Christ and find the hope of eternal life. Then, and only then, will we have a message worth preparing ourselves to deliver.

6. MAKING GOD KNOWN THROUGH WORKS

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16 ESV)

I trust that all of us now know quite well our mission as a CC community. Our mission is to know God and to make Him known.

Our passage this morning teaches us that our good works can cause people to give glory to our God. As a city set on a hill gives can be seen from miles away, so we are to live in such a way that the greatness of our God can be seen by those who look upon our lives. Our love for God and commitment to Him should not be hidden, but obvious to everyone.

Students, did you know that one of the good works God has called you to is the work of pursuing knowledge, understanding, and wisdom? As you pursue your education, you can do so in a way that honors God, or a way that dishonors God. Remember, whatever subject you are studying, you are seeking to learn about God. Therefore, the way you study says something to others about whether or not God is *worth* learning about. When you are memorizing facts, studying literature, or researching a scientist, are you doing so in a way that says God is *worthy* of your effort? Does your commitment to learning shine as a light to others, declaring that God is glorious and valuable?

Parents, let me remind us that our children are not only learning about God from our words, but from our works. Whether we are cleaning the house, cooking dinner, or helping a child with his math work, we are saying something to our children about God. If we are quick to let our children get by with shoddy work, we are telling them that God isn't deserving of their best. Yet if we teach our children to strive for excellence for God's sake, we must also be sure that *we* are striving for excellence too in all that we do.

Of course, the best works that we can do to make God known to others are works of love. If God's love dwells in us, it should overflow onto others. It should flow from parents to children and from children to parents. It should flow here in our Classical community between parents and between students. Every deed we do no matter how small should be rooted in love for God and love for others. When we live a life of love, we shine as bright torches in a dark world, drawing the attention of others for God's sake.

So let us strive today to give God our best, and to overflow in love that we may display the greatness of God to one another.

7. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW: A GOD-BREATHED BIBLE

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

Over the last several weeks we have seen that our mission is to know God and to make God known. This morning we begin to think about our *model*. The model of Classical Conversations is to combine the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview.

What does this mean? Put simply, it means that we use the Bible as the lens through which we see everything else. The Bible serves as a corrective lens to help us view and interpret the world rightly.

Another way of describing this is in terms of light and darkness. When we try and make sense of the world on our own, we are walking in darkness. We are blind. We grope around in a world without light. We can study math or science or history or literature, but we don't really *see* these as we ought. We don't see them in their relation to God. We can say that one plus one equals two, but we fail to grasp the glory of God revealed in that simple yet profound statement.

The Bible serves as a lamp for us. It shines light in the darkness, and helps us to see the world in its beauty. The light of the Scriptures helps us put every fact in its proper place, serving the purposes of our good God.

Why do we choose to view everything through the lens of the Bible? Because we believe that the Bible is accurate when it claims to be *God-breathed*. The Bible is not just another book to be set alongside *Robinson Crusoe* or *Pride and Prejudice*. It is the very Word of God, given to us for our good, able to equip us for whatever callings God places on our lives.

Parents and students, let us do everything we can today to see the world we are learning about from a biblical perspective. What matters most is not what we think, but what God thinks. What matters most is not what we say about a subject, nor what some expert says about a subject, but what God says. When we see the world with the light that He gives, we can rejoice that in a world of blind people, we have been granted to see.

8. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW: GOD AT THE CENTER

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11:36 ESV)

We are a community that has embraced a particular model of education. What is that model? We are seeking to combine the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview.

What do we mean by a *biblical* worldview? First and foremost, we mean a worldview that has God at the very center. No matter what subject we are talking about, whether it be astrophysics or the ABCs, we believe that these subjects exist for the glory of God and find their value and purpose in Him.

How can we be truly God-centered in our education? How can we make sure that God-centeredness isn't just something we say, but actually something we are implementing? Our verse this morning gives us help.

First, our verse teaches us that all are things are *from God*. This means that we can always connect any subject we are studying to God in terms of *origin*. Where did the Pythagorean theorem come from? It wasn't Pythagoras that created it. God did that. We learn something about God's character because this is true. Where did languages like English and Latin come from? It was God who created human beings in His image, with the ability to speak, and gave us the skills of language. This too tells us something about our God.

Second, our verse teaches us that all things are *through God*. There is nothing in this universe that does not exist because God allows it to do so. God is the sustainer of all things, upholding all things by His power. The rise and fall of nations, the writing of great books, the invention of world-changing technologies – these all come about through the providential work of God.

Third, our verse teaches us that all things are *for God*. If something exists, it is because God has a purpose for it. If some event takes place in history, it is because God is working through that event for the ultimate glory of His name. Ultimately, absolutely everything – including you and me – exist for God.

So here is a great help to us as we seek to be God-centered in our education. Whatever the subject we are studying we can be sure that it is from God, through God, and for God. To Him be glory forever, Amen.

9. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW: ETERNITY IN VIEW

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

(James 4:13-14 ESV)

We are seeking to combine the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview. Here is one great difference between the secular worldview and the biblical worldview: the secular worldview is focused on this life alone; the Christian worldview is focused on eternity.

Parents, we often remind one another around here that are educating for heaven, not Harvard. That doesn't mean that we are against sending our children to great institutions of learning. What it does mean is that we see life as it really is. It is short. What matters most of all is not whether our sons and daughters become successful in this life, but whether or not they live a life that stores up treasures in heaven. Compared to eternity, this life is but a vapor.

None of us are promised tomorrow. None of us are promised that we will reach a certain age. If we pursue education for this life only, we might find that we have wasted a great deal of time and energy. Instead, we ought to pursue an education that will make us *wise*, helping us to live a life that will have effects in the life to come. We want an education that helps us live today in a way that will resound for God's glory for ages and ages beyond.

Parents, this means that the *character* of your child must be more important to you than the knowledge, skills, or talents of your child. If your child knows lots of facts, or can write an excellent paper, but is full of pride and selfishness, then you've missed the mark. As we seek to educate our children, we must be sure that instruction in humility, in diligence, in kindness, and in respect are set above instruction in times tables, English grammar, and timelines.

Students, make sure you hear me this morning. We want you to work hard at your education. Strive for excellence in your learning! But even more important than that, we long for you to have a humble heart that is trusting in Christ and overflowing in love and kindness to others. In the long run, a life of faith, hope, and love will mean far more than a life of knowledge, skills, and talents. So let's live today with eternity in view.

10. THE TRIVIUM: KNOWLEDGE

The wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.
(Proverbs 10:14 ESV)

We are seeking to combine the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview. But what is the classical method of learning? It is often presented in three stages, known together as the *trivium*. This word *trivium* means “three roads” or “three paths”. It was understood in Medieval times the three skills of the trivium would equip a student to go on and study the *quadrivium* – the four subjects of higher learning.

The first stage of the trivium is the *grammar* stage. This is the stage where we are seeking to gain as much knowledge as we can about a particular subject. Without learning this initial grammar, we will never be able to go on and become a capable thinker in that subject. So, for example, I will never be able to fix the engine of my van until I have learned from someone else what the parts of the engine are and what their functions are. Without that basic knowledge, my engine just looks like a mixture of thingamajigs and whatchamacallits, and I have no ability to even begin to fix it.

Parents, this is why we as a community are committed to helping our children memorize as many facts as possible during their younger years. While their minds are like sponges, soaking up information, we want to give them as many memory pegs as possible that will serve them later on in life. The knowledge they gain today will enable them to have greater understanding and wisdom in the years ahead.

Students, learn from this that there is no subject that should scare you. There is no subject too difficult for you to learn. Instead, there are just some subjects that you have not yet learned the grammar for. Subjects like rocket science or bioengineering becomes much easier once you’ve memorized the basic facts and vocabulary of those subjects. A whole world of learning is open to you once you’ve come to understand that you can master anything if you’re willing to begin at the grammar stage – the stage of knowledge.

As Christians, we should love knowledge. The Bible teaches that fools despise knowledge, and when those who refuse knowledge open their mouths to speak they bring harm to themselves and others. If we are going to become leaders and influencers in our world, we must be quick to do what the wise do: store up knowledge. So let us store up as much as we can today.

11. THE TRIVIUM: UNDERSTANDING

*“How much better to get wisdom than gold!
To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.”*
(Proverbs 16:16 ESV)

The model of education that we are seeking to implement for our children is one that combines the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview. We saw last week that the classical method of learning, called the *trivium*, begins by storing up knowledge.

This morning we see the importance of moving beyond knowledge to understanding. As our children grow, they begin to become more *dialectic*. This is the second stage of the trivium: the *dialectic* stage. This word refers to logical thinking and debate. Our students are becoming dialectic when they begin to think for themselves, asking questions, considering propositions, and drawing their own conclusions. This is the stage of learning in which we see the light bulb coming on again and again in the minds of our children.

Students, here is something you should aim for, especially as you get older. Don't content yourself with memorizing facts. Desire more and more to really understand what you are learning. Seek to know the significance of what you are learning, why it matters, and how it affects our world. Every subject you are learning is connected to the whole – seek to see the connections! It is one thing to memorize a fact about World War II, it is quite another to understand how important that war was, and how it affected the lives of millions of Jews, as well as people like Corrie ten Boom. Much of the geography that we learn about in CC is a result of World War II. The boundary lines that separate many nations from one another were drawn because of that war. The more we grow in understanding, the more we begin to see how all of the subjects we study fit together.

How important is understanding? The Bible says that we should choose understanding over precious silver. It is better to be poor with great understanding than to be rich without it. A person with understanding will be able to make wise decisions, give good counsel, and bless others. Those without understanding will find themselves hindered by their lack of it.

Do we want to make a difference in this world for Christ? Do we want to live a life of wisdom that will bless others? Then let us not only lay up knowledge, but engage in the important yet joyful work of seeking understanding.

12. THE TRIVIUM: WISDOM

For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
(Proverbs 8:11 ESV)

This is our last week of the fall semester! Do you remember what our mission is? To know God and to make Him known. Do you remember what our model is? To combine the classical method of learning with a biblical worldview.

The classical method of learning is called the *trivium*, and it includes three stages. The first is the *grammar* stage, in which we store up knowledge. The second is the *dialectic* state, in which grow in understanding. The final stage is what we are thinking about this morning: the *rhetoric* stage. This is the stage in which we are able to call upon our knowledge and understanding in order to serve the cause of wisdom. This is the stage in which we are able to articulate well to ourselves and others wise choices that honor God and serve others.

The Bible reminds us again and again how important wisdom is. In our verse this morning, we are told that wisdom is better than jewels, and that everything else we might desire put together cannot compare with her. Think of everything you desire. Think of everything you wish you had. The Bible says that wisdom is better than all of it. We should not be surprised that in the New Testament our Lord Jesus is called *the wisdom of God*.

The skills of rhetoric include being able to write well and speak well. This is because all of our knowledge and understanding cannot serve the cause of wisdom if we are not able to persuade and influence others. This is why we should work hard to grow in our writing and presentation skills – through these we will be able to point people in the way of wisdom.

However, all of our rhetorical skills won't matter at all if cannot point people in a wise direction. Without wisdom, our rhetorical skills will do more harm than good. How do we become wise? First, we begin with a proper view of God. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Without a true and reverent respect for God, you can never be wise. Second, we should ask God to give us wisdom. The apostle James teaches us that God always answers this prayer – God loves to give His people wisdom. Third, fearing God, and depending upon Him for wisdom, we take all of our knowledge and understanding, and we use them to rightly interpret whatever situation or circumstance is in front of us.

Parents, students, here is our goal! Let us never forget it. We are seeking to glorify God by knowing Him and making Him known. We do this by educating towards wisdom. We must have the fear of God. We must have prayer. We must have knowledge and understanding. Put these together with God's blessing, and we will find before our eyes a generation of young men and women who are truly wise.

1. THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV)

What will make us a strong, healthy community that blesses every family and every student among us? We could give many answers, but none greater than love. Our God has loved us so much that He sent His own Son to die for us. Now, as Christians, we live in the reality of His love, and we are called to show love to one another.

What does love look like in a Classical Conversations community? Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians 13 that love is patient. We are to be patient with one another. We are to understand that all of us are in different places in our walk with Christ. All of us are in different places in our growth as parents and in our growth as home-educators. So let's be patient with one another and relate to each other with an attitude of helpfulness.

Paul goes on to say that love is kind. This means that we should seek to put the needs of one another above our own. We are to look for ways that we can bless each other. All of us need encouragement from time to time. Sometimes a particular mom or a particular family can get lost in the crowd. They are here with us at CC, but they still feel alone and isolated. Let's work on showing warmth and care and kindness to everyone in our community.

Paul says that love does not envy. Sometimes we see that family that seems to have it altogether, and we are tempted to envy. We wonder how everything can go so well for them while we are struggling just to get to CC on time. But envy keeps us from loving that family as we ought. The truth is, none of us have it altogether, and even that family needs our love and care.

Paul also says that love does not boast. We are not to take pride in our accomplishments, or in our children's accomplishments, and boast before others. Moreover, we must be careful never to look down on families who have struggles we don't. Rather, let's realize that we are all sinners in need of God's grace, and that we are all in this homeschooling journey together. So above all, as we begin this second semester of CC, let us love one another.

2. KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES'

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.
(1 Corinthians 4:2 ESV)

One great threat to our joy and peace as we homeschool is the temptation to feel that we must keep up with the Jones'. You know who the Jones' are. They are the family with perfect children who are always well-behaved. The younger children make memory master every year, have no struggles in their education, and are always eager to learn. The older children are in Challenge, and they never fail to go the extra mile in every assignment. They excel in every skill and every subject. On top of all this, the Jones' are always full of joy and peace, never quarreling among themselves or with others, and they've never experienced a bad day.

The Jones' do not exist. But too often we think they do, *and* that we must keep up with them. We become frustrated when our children do not learn quickly. We are embarrassed when we realize we forgot to pack a child's lunch or a tin whistle is missing. That would never happen to Mrs. Jones!

Parents, do you ever compare yourself to other CC parents? Are you ever discouraged because you don't have the knowledge or the gifts that another CC parent has? Do you ever find yourself comparing your children with others in CC? Do you feel discouraged or even like you've failed because your child doesn't seem to be at the same place as another?

Our verse this morning reminds us of a precious truth. We are *stewards*. Our children have been entrusted to us by God. He has given us the great privilege of raising and teaching them. He is all-wise and never makes a mistake. He gave you the gifts and abilities that you have. He gave you the children that you have. Your calling is not to be a perfect parent. Your calling is simply this: that you be found *faithful*.

Don't be paralyzed by comparing yourself and your family with others. Don't be paralyzed by worrying what others think about you and your children. What matters most is not what others think, but what *God* thinks. He has called you to parent *your* children, with all of the glorious struggles and triumphs that entails. So find freedom here, and depending upon God for strength, let us all strive to be faithful stewards of the children He has entrusted to us.

3. SERVE ONE ANOTHER

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
(Galatians 5:13 ESV)

One of the most wonderful aspects of Classical Conversations is that this program brings homeschooling moms and dads together with others in community. There are many who could give testimony of how the encouragement and support of other homeschooling parents has given them the strength they needed at just the right time to persevere in this good work.

Another helpful aspect of homeschooling together as a community is that we get to help carry one another's burdens. Christ Himself came not to be served, but to serve, and He calls His people to imitate Him in that great endeavor. Here at CC, we often learn of families within this homeschooling community who have needs. It should be our joy to show love to one another by helping to meet those needs when we can.

Sometimes we will encounter a Christian at church who is constantly receiving, receiving, receiving, but never giving back. This Christian benefits from the preaching and teaching of the church, from the service that others give in leading Sunday School classes or keeping the nursery. But as long as this Christian continues to be served, without beginning to serve herself, she will remain an unhealthy, immature Christian. It is when we begin to step out in service to others that we truly come to know what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It is as we serve that our faith is tested and refined and made stronger. More than that, it is as we serve that Christ works through us to care for others.

Not only at church, but also here at CC we need everyone to be looking for opportunities and ways to serve. You may be able to serve as a director or tutor, as a nursery worker or activity organizer, or in some other role. Or, you may be able to serve in an unofficial way just by looking for little needs that need to be met as we meet together. Whatever the case, let us remember God's Word to us as spoken through Peter in 1st Peter 4:10: "*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*"

As we look for opportunities to serve, may God not only bless us as individuals and as families, but may He make this community strong, and cause our children to be more greatly shaped into the men and women of God He calls them to be.

4. STRIVE FOR PEACE

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
(Romans 12:18 ESV)

Have you ever noticed how easy it is for us to be offended? All it takes is a misspoken word, a cold tone of voice, or a wrong look, and our flesh can be quick to take offense. Yet the Bible calls God's people to be lovers of peace. "*Blessed are the peacemakers,*" Jesus said, "*For they shall be called sons of God.*"

Our desire and prayer is that our CC community will be marked by a spirit of peace. We want this community to be a haven where students feel comfortable and secure, free to try out new skills that they are learning or to engage in important conversations without fear of being judged. We want every homeschool mom and dad to be able to confess their weaknesses and struggles with others in this community, and to find real help, encouragement and love from other parents. When conflicts come, and we allow ourselves to hold on to offenses, or allow bitterness to simmer in our hearts, we undermine the peace that makes a CC community so warm, hospitable, and supportive.

What can we do to have joyful peace here? First, whenever possible, let us be quick to overlook wrongs done to us. Proverbs 19:11 says, "*Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.*" Sometimes we will be spoken to in a harsh way, or with an ill-chosen word. Yet often, the person speaking to us this way is in the midst of hurt or struggle themselves. What they need from us is not for us to take offense, but to respond with understanding, compassion and love. When we consider how much Christ forgives us every day, how can we not be quick to forgive one another and to overlook minor offenses?

Sometimes conflicts will arise that we cannot overlook. In that case, we are to follow the principles of our Lord in Matthew 18. Yet even as we walk through those steps, let us remember that we cannot control the attitudes or actions of other people. God does not hold us responsible for the hearts of others, but for our own. Therefore, as our verse says, "*as far as it depends on you*", let us be faithful in doing what is right and treating others with love, even when we feel we are not receiving the same from others. When conflicts come, let them remind us that we are not in heaven yet, and long all the more for the day when conflicts will no longer be a part of our lives. Till then, may all of us set the example for our families and for others of pursuing peace in every relationship and every situation. In this way, God will be glorified, and all of us will be blessed.

5. THE RIGHT APPROACH TO CONFLICT

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

(Matthew 18:15-17 ESV)

In our last devotion we saw that we should strive for peace with everyone. We praise God when our CC communities are marked by a joyful peace that allows all of us to learn together and grow strong.

We also saw last time that we pursue peace first and foremost by not being easily offended and by being quick to overlook minor wrongs that are done to us.

There are times, however, when a substantial conflict does arise. Sometimes love demands that action be taken because of some wrong that has been done. When that happens, let us be sure to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 18.

Before any other action is taken, let us take our own hearts and our own concerns to the Lord in prayer. Let us make sure that our own attitudes and desires are right, and that God’s glory is our chief concern. The goal in resolving conflict is never to “win” or to be proven “right”, but to see God glorified in everyone involved.

After making sure our hearts are right, Jesus commands us to go directly to the person with whom there is a conflict. We are not to talk about the conflict with others, nor should we ever seek to harm another person’s reputation. The goal is to settle the conflict and to make peace with the other person and to restore the friendship. This is not something to be done over email or Facebook, where it is all-too-easy for our communication to be misunderstood. Instead, we should go to the other person face-to-face if possible, confess any wrongdoing on our own part, gently admonish in love, and seek reconciliation. Often, God is gracious, and the conflict ends there.

If, however, restoration does not seem to be coming as you speak with the other person, the best practice is to share the conflict with one or two who are in leadership here – preferably a director who can accompany you and help you in pursuing peace. Again, keep the matter as private as possible, and in this way continue to show love to this one with whom you are seeking peace.

Finally, respecting those in leadership who have been asked to help work for peace, continue to pray for God’s help and to submit to the counsel you are given. Through this process, expect God to work for His glory and our good. Conflict is never fun, but often we look back and see how God used it to make us a little more like our Savior. So let us pursue peace, and when conflict comes, let us trust the wisdom of our Lord and follow His steps.

6. CC IS NOT CHURCH

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

(Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV)

We should thank God regularly for our CC community and honor Him for how He works through these programs, these tutors, and these families to serve us and care for us. Every good gift comes from His hands, and He deserves our praise.

However, we also must be clear that our CC community must never be a replacement for the local church. CC serves many Christian families, and in this way CC serves the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, but CC can never be a substitute for the Church. Christ came to build His Church, not a CC community.

Why is it important that CC not replace your church? Think of all the wonderful gifts Christ gives us only appropriately in a local church. There is the faithful preaching of God’s Word on a weekly basis. There is the loving oversight of pastors. There is the accountability that we have from fellow church members who have covenanted together to care for one another and even to admonish one another when necessary. There are the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Through our local churches, we are able to participate in the great work of missions and kingdom building. Also, more than anywhere else, our local church is to be our primary place of offering up heartfelt worship to God in a corporate setting, and receiving intensive training in discipleship.

Certainly God uses CC as a means of discipleship in our lives. Certainly there is a kind of fellowship and sometimes even an accountability that is provided here that is helpful to us. But at the end of the day, CC never can be and never should be a replacement for your local church. Our CC community will be strongest and healthiest when our families are benefitting from their participation in faithful, healthy local churches.

So let us praise God for CC and all that God does here to care for us. But let us praise God even more for our local churches, and let us be careful never to neglect them or replace them. Let CC serve the cause of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and never take away from that great cause.

7. Do Not Grow Weary

*“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap,
if we do not give up.
(Galatians 6:9 ESV)*

Parents, seeking to give your children a God-centered, classical education is a *good* endeavor. This is a worthwhile cause, one that shows great love for God and great love for your children.

However, especially as we come to this season of the year, it is easy for us to become weary. We may have lost the freshness and the drive that we had at the beginning of the school year. We may be counting down the days until summer break.

Students, seeking to learn all that your parents are asking you to learn is a *good* endeavor. It is right and wonderful for you to strive for excellence in your education, wanting to do the best you can in every skill, mastering every subject. Yet at this point in the year, students too often become weary. You may be wondering if summer will ever get here.

Our verse this morning is an encouragement for us to finish well! Pursuing a quality education is not a sprint – it is a marathon. As we come to the final weeks of this particular school year, we don’t want to drop out of the race. We’ve worked so hard to get this far; let’s do all we can to end with a bang!

Why? Our God tells us that if we do not give up, we will reap in due season. There is a harvest that comes to those who work hard. What is the harvest we are praying for and working for? It is the harvest of godly young men and women who are well-equipped to live with integrity and influence in this world.

Parents, remember the vision that brought you into CC to begin with. Remember how we desire for our children to have the best education we can give them, one that focuses on the heart as well as the brain. There is only a few weeks left – let’s make the most of them!

Students, remember that the adult you will be in the future is being shaped by the choices you make right now. Don’t slack off when you are so close to the finish line. Seek to be a person who perseveres, who endures, who stretches his neck out a little further and runs a little harder as the finish line comes into view.

Let us pray that God would renew our strength and refresh our souls. *“Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not give up.”*

8. Take Time to Rest!

“And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”
(Mark 6:31 ESV)

We live in a culture that is always on the go. Many homeschool families find themselves constantly on the road, running from music practice to sports practice to church events and more. Homeschooling moms and dads can often become overwhelmed as they seek to educate their children while managing other responsibilities and juggling other obligations.

Our verse this morning is a reminder that all of us need rest. Our bodies need rest. We cannot be faithful in our callings if we are continually failing to get the physical rest our bodies need. When we are tired, we often become less clear in our thinking, less articulate in our speaking, more irritable and grumpy. We simply are not at our best when we are tired.

Students, this is important for you, too. It is important that you get the rest you need in order to give your best to your studies. Colossians 3:23-24 says, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”* So students, right now, God’s calling on your life is that you serve Jesus by working heartily in your studies. Jesus is worthy of your best. Therefore, you need to make sure you have your rest.

Of course, we need more than physical rest. We also need spiritual rest. The principle of *Sabbath* is very important in the Bible. Let us be sure that we are taking advantage of our Sundays to be refreshed in the Word of God and by fellowship with His people.

Parents, let us also be sure that we never compromise the most important priorities for lesser ones. Sometimes we can allow those supplemental activities in our children’s lives to crowd out the time and energy that needs to be spent in homeschooling. Our children are learning from us how to prioritize their own time; if we don’t want them living hectic, stretched-too-thin lives when they are older, then we need to set that example now.

So for our own sake and for our families, let us be sure to receive the gift of rest from our God.

9. Sufficient Grace

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

(2nd Corinthians 12:9 ESV)

Sometimes we can feel as though God is putting more on us than we can handle. When we feel that way, we are exactly right. *In our own strength*, we can never faithfully fulfill the callings God has placed upon us. Parents cannot be faithful parents. Students cannot be faithful students. If we are to love God, love one another, strive for excellence, and see God’s glory in every subject we study, we must have His blessing and His help. On our own, we will surely fail.

For many of us, this school year has gone differently than we expected. God has brought trials or changes into our lives that we did not anticipate. Perhaps God has placed some burdens on you that have made your homeschooling journey a little more complicated or difficult. Wherever we are in that journey this morning, we can find comfort in this promise from God’s Word.

God’s grace is sufficient for us. Think about that word *sufficient*. This word means that we need nothing more. This word means that God’s grace is everything we need in order to be who God has called us to be. As Christians, we are not ill-equipped for our callings. God has not left us without the resources we need to serve Him. His grace is all we need – it is sufficient.

What does this mean practically? It means that when we look away from ourselves and instead put our trust in God’s promises, He gives us His strength. Every day we are to be freshly nourished and equipped by believing upon God’s grace. We are to remember that our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ. We are to remember that our God is with us and that He will not leave us nor forsake us. We are to remember that He is working all for the good of His people. As we put our roots deep into these promises, we draw from them the nourishment and strength to fulfill our callings as Christians, spouses, parents, or students.

So don’t feel overwhelmed today. Don’t be like Peter sinking in the water because he sees the ferocity of the turbulent wind and waves. Instead, be like Peter as he looked upon the face of the Lord Jesus and found peace. God is glorified in us when we acknowledge that we are desperate for His help, and then in happy faith depend on Him to give us all the strength we need to be faithful.

10. Encouraging One Another

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”
(1st Thessalonians 5:11 ESV)

One of the most important and helpful qualities of Classical Conversations is this aspect of *community*. What a tremendous help it is to know that we are not on our own, but that there are others with us in this homeschool journey that we can rely on and glean from.

One of the greatest ways that we can care for one another in this community is through encouragement. As our verse says, Christians are to be a people who seek to build one another up. The word *encourage* means to instill or inspire courage in someone. Who is it that you will speak to today who needs a little boost of courage? Who in our community needs to be built up?

As Christians, God has given us wonderful resources through which to give one another courage. We can always point one another back to the precious promises of God. The Bible is a treasure trove of truths that can strengthen and build up a believer. The Holy Spirit often uses fellow Christians to bring a timely word to us from the Scriptures that is exactly what we need to hear in a particular circumstance.

Another way we can encourage one another is by pointing out the strengths and evidences of grace we see in one another’s lives. When we’ve been helped by the words or example of another homeschool mom, we should let them know how they have helped us. When we’ve been well-served or cared for by another person, we should share with them how they have benefitted us. When we see that someone is contributing something positive to this community, let us be quick to point it out. Let us give honor where honor is due.

Students, we should work hard to encourage one another in our classes. Be quick to root one another on and to congratulate one another when someone in the class does well. As a community, we are not only to rejoice when we do well ourselves, but when those around us are growing and learning and succeeding.

As we begin this CC day, let me ask you again: who can you encourage today? Let us all look for the opportunity to build up someone else, and may God use us to inspire one another on towards excellence for His namesake.

11. Finishing Well

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”
(Acts 20:24 ESV)

Our verse this morning is an encouragement to each of us to finish well. The Apostle Paul knew what God had called him to do, and he was willing to pay any price necessary to finish his course and fulfill his responsibility.

What does this look like for us? For parents, let us be careful that we not take our eyes off the ball here at the end of the school year. Let us help our Challenge students as they study for Blue Book assessments and prepare end of year presentations. Let us come alongside our Foundations and Essentials students and make sure they don't miss these final weeks of memory work and grammar instruction.

At the same time, let us be sure to celebrate all that has been accomplished this year. In those areas where we have seen our students work hard, let us praise them. Let us consider with them all of their accomplishments, and let's rejoice with them. As parents, this is also the time of year to carefully assess how much our students have learned, where strengths and weaknesses lie, and what goals need to be set for next year.

Students, think about how far you have come. Think about how much you have learned over the past year, and how you have grown and improved in many areas. Be thankful for all the time and energy your mom and dad have spent in helping you to get this far. Be thankful to God for giving you these opportunities and the ability to learn. Now, over these final weeks, resolve to finish well. If you are a Challenge Student, put your heart into your studies as you prepare for the end of year assessments and presentations. If you are an Essentials student, strive to make your final paper the best one yet. If you are a Foundation student, make sure you learn these last weeks of memory work, and see how much of the year's material you can remember. Again, thank God for every fact you've been able to remember. If you weren't able to be a memory master this year, start thinking about what can you do next year to reach that goal.

Most importantly, let us finish the school year with the right attitude. Let our hearts be full of thanksgiving to God. Let our hearts also be full of love towards one another, eager to celebrate together all that God has done in our students and in our families.

12. Give God the Glory

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”
(Psalm 115:1 ESV)

This morning we want to give God the glory for all that He has done among us this year. It is God who has created us. He has given us our families and brought us together. It is God who gives us the ability to learn and grow. He has given us the privilege of being able to homeschool, and He has given us the privilege of being able to join together in this program.

For every director and every tutor who has had a positive impact on students, let us give God the glory.

For every subject in which our students came to see more of the awesome wisdom of God, let us give God the glory.

For every student who grew in knowledge, understanding, or wisdom, let us give God the glory.

For every parent who was able to persevere to the end, let us give God the glory.

For every encouraging word, helpful hint, and comforting hug that was given this year, let us give God the glory.

For every nursery worker, tutor sub, and all who stepped in to meet needs in this community, let us give God the glory.

For every obstacle that was overcome, every conflict that was resolved, and every challenge that was met, let us give God the glory.

For the CC corporate and these great resources that have been provided to us and our families, let us give God the glory.

For His sustaining and sufficient grace, let us give God the glory.

Finally, for the godly young men and women these students are becoming, let us give God the glory.

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”