



Recruitment Devotions for Upper Grades

I. GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU

John 15:16 - You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.

Nathan and a group of his friends headed for the empty lot down the street. Equipped with bats, balls, and gloves, they were looking forward to a game of baseball. In order to play, they had to choose sides. Normally, this wasn't a problem, but today Nathan's nine-year-old brother, Travis, tagged along and he couldn't play very well.

When they all lined up, Nathan and his buddy, Tom, started to choose their teams. Eventually everyone was chosen except Travis. No one wanted Travis on his team. Travis knew this, and it really hurt to know that even his brother didn't want him. He looked down at his feet and rubbed the dirt with his shoe. Then he remembered something his Sunday school teacher had told him. She had read the Bible verse where Jesus said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you...*". Of course there is more in the verse, but right now that's the part that Travis needed. Even if he wasn't on this ball team he was still on God's team. God chose him. God wanted him. That made him feel better. He decided to make the best of an unhappy situation by offering to keep score. Nathan and Tom quickly accepted his offer and the game got under way. Travis found he actually had more fun watching their silly mistakes as they played because he didn't have to worry about making any of his own!

Later that day Nathan thanked Travis for being such a good sport so that he, Tom, and their other friends could play. Then Nathan took Travis out to the back yard and helped him learn to catch and throw better.

Not all such situations end happily and not all our choices are smart ones. But what a comforting thought that God has chosen us. His choices are never wrong, for God is perfect. He wants us.

Now let's look at the rest of the verse in our reading: *You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.*

Out of grace and mercy the Lord chose us. None of us could have chosen to become one of God's own. God chose us and he gave us our faith. Now God wants us, his chosen ones, to bear the fruits of that faith he has given us, and do that not just occasionally but always. That means we are to live God-pleasing lives. We are to let our faith shine, not only to show God our gratitude and love but also to show others our joy in Christ so they may come to share the hope he gives us.

What a wonderful opportunity for a Christian! By God's grace, our faith shines, As it does, others are led to their Savior. It sounds so easy, and yet sometimes it can be so hard. The temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful selves are strong. There are also so many people we have yet to reach and in such far away places that we wonder how we can possibly do it all!

That's where a special choice comes in... a choice that God, in his grace, lets us make. No Christian

alone can take care of all the areas of the world. That's why our church trains pastors and teachers, to go where we cannot go. Many of them work here in our own country but some also serve as missionaries to people in foreign countries.

Unfortunately, there are still areas of the world we cannot reach. There just aren't enough pastors and teachers to carry on this work. But perhaps some of you will choose to prepare to be full-time workers in God's kingdom. Perhaps a fruit of your faith will be choosing to become a pastor or a teacher. Martin Luther College is the school our synod operates to train you to do that.

God chose each of us to be his own and to bear him fruit. Whatever career in life God leads you to choose, let your faith shine through it. But don't forget that special choice -- to be one of God's full-time servants. Maybe God has chosen *you* to be a pastor or teacher. Think about it. Pray about it. God will guide you.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for choosing us to be your own. Help us by your Holy Spirit to bear God-pleasing fruits of our faith. May we also remember to pray for our pastors and teachers wherever they might be, that they may serve you faithfully and fruitfully. And, if it is your will, enable us to bear special fruits of faith by becoming special messengers for you. We pray this in your name. Amen.



II. THINGS WORTH STRESSING

Titus 3:8 - *This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

In your home, if there is something important that your parents want you to know, they will stress it. They may repeat it. They may even ask you, "Now do you understand?" Here in the classroom, if there is something important that I want you to learn and remember I will emphasize or stress it. I may even ask you to repeat it back to me on a quiz or a test.

In our reading for today, the apostle Paul was writing to Titus, a young pastor. Titus had learned many things from the apostle Paul. There were certain things that Paul wanted Titus especially to remember and so he told him, "*This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things.*"

The things of which Paul was speaking were mentioned right before this verse. Paul wanted Titus to stress the truth - JESUS HAS SAVED US! He wanted Titus to remember *why* Jesus saved us and *how* he saved us.

Why has Jesus saved us? In verse 5 of this chapter Paul reminds Timothy, "*He saved us not because of the righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.*" Paul stresses this to us as well. Jesus didn't save us because we are good. In fact, by nature we are anything but good. We are rotten with sin, all the way through. Instead, God saved us because he loves us. Tremendous, isn't it? In spite of who we are -- sinners -- and in spite of how unlovable we often show ourselves to be, God still loves us. That is *why* Jesus saved us.

And how has Jesus saved us? Paul wrote, "*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*" (*Chances are good that upper grade students have memorized this verse*) At our

baptism, all of our sins were washed away because of Christ's perfect life and innocent death. It was nothing we did, nothing we could do that saved us. Instead, it was our perfect and loving Savior who willingly gave up his life for us. As a result we are justified, that is, declared "not guilty" before God.

These things Paul wanted Titus to stress to others and us. They are these same things God still wants stressed today, namely, His Law and His Gospel. He wants them stressed here in the classroom and out on the playground. He wants them stressed from the pulpit on Sunday morning and while we are at home during the week.

God says to you and me, "I want you to stress my Law and my Gospel to yourself and to others!" Stress that we are saved by God's grace, not our own good works. Stress that we are saved because of Christ's perfect life and innocent death.

We stress these things for ourselves by studying God's Word. We stress them for others when we let others know what we believe by the way we act and the things we say.

Some of you could stress these things in a very special way by preparing to be a pastor, a teacher, or a missionary in Christ's church. Has God given *you* the heart to put that kind of stress on his Word in your life?

It's a question worth considering, because God's truth is worth stressing. May the Lord help us all to do that in the way that serves him best!

Prayer: O Lord, in a world that knows so little of your truth, our Law and Gospel deserve to be stressed. Help us to take every opportunity you give us to emphasize your hatred for sin and your love for the sinner. Let others see our Savior stressed in all we say and do. In his name we ask it. Amen.



III. SEEING GOD AS HE REALLY IS

2 Corinthians 4:6 - *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

There is an old Hindu fable about a group of blind men who were each asked to describe an elephant. Never having seen an elephant, they each reached out to touch the beast to see what it might feel like. The first man reached out and touched a great broad leg and he said, "The elephant is very much like a sycamore tree, for it has a stout, rugged trunk." The second blind man happened to grab the elephant's ear and he said, "No, the elephant is much more like the palm tree, for its leaves are broad and flat and cold." The third blind man had a hold of the elephant's trunk and he exclaimed, "You are both wrong, for the elephant is clearly a kind of snake with a strong, sinewy body." But the fourth man grasped the elephant's skinny tail and he cried, "You're all mistaken! The elephant is most like a rope of hemp, slender yet tough!"

Of course, they all were wrong. Each of them had the elephant in his own two hands, yet none really knew how to describe an elephant because they could not see him. They were blind.

When it comes to seeing and knowing God, we sinners suffer from a similar kind of blindness. In our sin-fulness, we can not see God as he really is and so we can come up with some pretty strange ideas of what God is like. One person may look only at the Ten Commandments and decide, "God is like a stern judge who expects everything to go by the book and who has no time for anyone who does anything wrong." Someone else may read only what the Bible says about God's love and think, "God is really like a kindly old Grampa who just winks an eye when his kids do something wrong and goes on loving them anyway."

Those people could even come up with Bible passages to support their view, but they aren't seeing what God is really like. They may know part of God but, like the blind men in the story, they aren't seeing the whole elephant.

On our own, you and I would suffer from the same sort of blindness. But God graciously has opened our eyes by introducing us to his Son, Jesus. It is when we come to *know* Jesus that we come to *see* what God is really like.

St. Paul tells us, *God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light to shine in our hearts...* By nature our hearts are filled only with darkness -- the darkness of sin. In that darkness we could not find the light we need to see and know God. But what we could not do, God has done for us.

Paul points out that it was a powerful miracle when, at the beginning of time, God said "Let there be light" and the eternal darkness was at last broken. It is the same power of God that lights up the darkness of the sinner's heart, but it is also something more... not only God's power but also God's grace. You see, we do not deserve the saving gift God gives us. By nature we don't even want it. We are perfectly happy in the darkness of our sins. In our blindness, we don't even realize we can not see.

Yet God, in his grace, knew we needed his gift and he gave it... in the form of his Son, our Savior. Daily we sin and deserve sin's wages. But Christ Jesus brought us back from death at the price of his own life. Now where his Gospel shines in our hearts, the shadows of sin are chased away and the darkness of the devil gives way to God's light.

What joy for us hopeless sinners to discover that we *do* have hope in Jesus! We echo St. Paul who writes, *We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God!* Seeing God in Jesus Christ, we recognize the hope we have not only of present forgiveness but of future salvation, the eternity we will spend in God's heavenly light.

But as we recognize more clearly the hope we have in Christ, we also understand more fully the meaning of St. Peter's encouragement, *Be ready always to give answer to this hope in you.* And we all will have opportunities to do that. Like the Hindu men in the fable, we too will be asked to "describe the elephant," -- to bear witness to the hope we have in Christ Jesus. You can do that right now as believers in Jesus. You could do it in the future as full-time servants of the Savior -- as pastors and teachers and missionaries.

We have one great advantage over the men in the fable, however. In Christ, we're no longer blind. We can see God's grace; we can see God's glory. We can see God because we know Jesus.

Thank God for opening our eyes to his Gospel. As he reveals it to us, let us reveal it to others!

Prayer: O Lord God, you have opened our eyes to the light of your Gospel so that we may see Jesus, our Savior, with eyes of faith. Help us also to see how we may best serve you, as witnesses now to the hope you have given us and, perhaps, as your full-time servants in the future in the preaching or teaching ministry. We ask these blessings in Jesus' name. Amen.

IV. AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:19-20 - *He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.*

Ambassador! That is a pretty impressive title. The major powers of the world, as well as many smaller countries, have ambassadors serving in foreign embassies throughout the world. Their job is to serve as authorized messengers or representatives of their home nation. They are to communicate with their host country and act as a spokesperson for their government. This position is especially important in our troubled world today.

But there are other, more important ambassadors in this world. They are the ambassadors of Jesus Christ. They are authorized messengers or representatives of God who speak with the authority of God himself. These ambassadors are here to act as God's spokespersons, to tell others how sin makes them enemies of God and how God's love has forgiven them and made them his children.

God places his ambassadors into a world of foreigners -- people who do not know about Jesus or the Bible. As God's spokespersons in a world of unbelievers, Christ's ambassadors are to tell these foreigners just what God expects of them (God's Law). But then, more importantly, they must tell what God has done for all people in Jesus, the Savior (God's Gospel).

Just who are these ambassadors for Christ? In our reading St. Paul tells us, *WE are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.* As believers in Jesus Christ, we are also spokespersons for the saving work he has done for us and for everyone. God has put us into this world to represent him, to speak and act and live for him. It's something to think about... when people look at us, do they see the One we represent. Do they recognize us as ambassadors of Christ?

God wants every Christian to be his ambassador, but the Savior also has special spokespersons, ones who speak for Jesus full-time. They are our pastors and teachers and missionaries. These people serve the Lord by speaking to people at home and abroad who need to hear the Savior's voice. They strengthen, comfort, and guide believers in Jesus and they witness to those who do not yet believe. The special joy they have is knowing that they speak for Christ. The power of their message is the power of God himself.

Maybe you can become one of those special ambassadors. Consider this special service to the Savior. Can you become a pastor or teacher? As you pray to the Lord for guidance in your life, consider full-time work in his kingdom. It is a wonderful way to be an ambassador for Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to serve and to save all the lost. Help us to make a commitment as Christians to serve you as your ambassadors, speaking your good news of salvation to all who will listen. If it is your will, enable us to make a further commitment by becoming your special ambassadors as pastors or teachers in your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

