

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM & FAITH

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Montgomery, Texas

When we look around the world today, the news is often filled with negative reports and rhetoric. We see people demonstrating a general lack of love and respect for each other. If you take it at face value, it is easy to get discouraged. But today...we have gathered together, from **ALL** faiths...to pray for our nation, for our neighbors, and for our family; and we see how **UNITED** this country truly is. We are strengthened by our differences, grounded by our faith, and transformed through our prayers.

This reminds me of my first day as president of Sam Houston State University. We all know what it is like to start a new job - I was happy, excited and nervous all at the same time. Early that morning, I met with my pastor who led me in prayer. Later that afternoon, I learned that one of our own, a young SHSU student, was killed in a car accident on their way to class. I sent a letter of condolence to the grieving parents. It was one of the hardest things I ever had to do and it never gets easier. You can never be prepared for those moments but I believe the time I spent in prayer that morning gave me the strength I needed.

Nothing is more satisfying than to watch our youth mature in their wisdom and faith. And there is nothing more precious than seeing our youngest children start a relationship with God through prayer. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Proverbs 22:6 says to “train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

I love children. Some of the things they say are so full of insight. They give us such an unvarnished view of our world. I’d like to share with you a few prayers and letters addressed to God from children. Even through the most innocent, we can see a nascent relationship between faith and knowledge.

- From Jenny: “Dear God, My mommy told me what you do. Who does it when you are on vacation?”
- Donna was already showing her critical thinking skills when she wrote, “Dear God, We read Thomas Edison made light. But in Sunday school, they said you did it. So, I bet he stoled your idea.”
- Evidently, Jack had not made that wisdom/faith connection just yet. “Dear God, There isn’t school in heaven is there?”
- Larry obviously had been listening in Sunday school. “Dear God, Maybe Cain and Abel would not have wanted to kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother.”

- Angelina went straight to the source for answers. “Dear God, Mommy says all babies cry, but I don’t think baby Jesus did. You must know the answer, so please write back. We have a bet.”
- And finally, Charles, who was rather astute for his age, wrote: “Dear God, I do not think anybody could be a better God. Well, I just wanted you to know but I am not just saying that because you are God.”

I’ve been in education for the majority of my career, a life-long learner. And the more knowledge I gained, the stronger my faith has become. Over the past few centuries, we have seen huge advances in science and innovation, most would look at this as miraculous. Brilliant thinkers have pushed the envelope of our understanding – Copernicus, Galileo, Michealangelo – they operated on the principal that science and knowledge were not the enemy of faith, but that the quest for a more thorough understanding of our universe might actually deepen and enrich that faith. Whatever your religion, great minds have undoubtedly helped spread that message and elevate that faith to where it is today.

Galileo, known for his breakthroughs in astronomy, mathematics, and physics, was the first to point a telescope to the stars to study our universe. What he saw in space was beyond our comprehension at the time, and it deeply challenged our

beliefs and understanding. Faced with imprisonment and persecution, Galileo famously said, “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to avoid their use.”

350 years later we sent astronauts into that same vast, blue space. On one of his later trips, John Glenn, the first man to orbit the earth, observed the majesty of our planet and said, “To look out at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is to me impossible. ... It just strengthens my faith. I wish there were words to describe what it's like.”

All the major religions recognize the importance of pursuing education and knowledge. Proverbs 9:9 says “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.”

A critical goal in Buddhism is to attain wisdom and that the heart and mind are inextricably joined.

In the Arabic language, “to know” ultimately means “to be transformed by the very process of knowing.” And, according to Islamic philosophy the purpose of life and the purpose of knowledge are the same.

In Hindu philosophy, a person's mind and senses are powers of the soul therefore; they should be strengthened, widened, deepened, and purified.

The Jewish Encyclopedia states all human wisdom and skill come from God.

Wisdom is acquired by the observation of nature and of history as well as by study and association with the wise.

With knowledge comes a greater understanding of the world and the people who share it. Changing the **EXTERNAL** world for the better requires the **INTERNAL** transformation of people who are willing to lead in order to bring about such changes.

Higher education plays a major role in shaping the quality of leadership in society.

A primary goal for colleges and universities is to develop leadership skills and abilities among the students who will become the future citizen leaders, better preparing them for professional and community responsibilities. Future leaders will not only need to possess new knowledge and skills, but will also be called upon to display a high level of emotional and spiritual wisdom and maturity. Some

scholars contend that the essence of leadership stems from the soul rather than from behavior.

Mahatma Gandhi is one example of such an individual whose life was driven by an inner faith. He believed that “all religions were manifestations of the Truth and that people of different faiths should and could live in peace and harmony. As a leader of social reform, Gandhi encouraged many people to commit their lives to truth and nonviolence and to act for the service of humanity. His leadership involved working with diverse groups of people with the aim of resisting injustice and exploitation and working toward the betterment of all people.

Martin Luther King’s commitment to nonviolence was intimately tied to his faith and trust in God. It was not just a moral stance or higher ground. Because of his faith, he fundamentally believed in the effectiveness of nonviolence for reconciliation.

Knowledge is defined as information gained through experience, reasoning or acquaintance. Wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, right or lasting. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for, the

conviction of things not seen. It sounds complicated, but I like to think of it in more simple terms:

Knowledge informs us, wisdom protects us and faith guides us.

In the spirit of National Prayer Day, I would like to share a short prayer for knowledge, wisdom and faith:

Lord of heaven and earth,

I pray that as I search for knowledge in study that I would discover divine treasure.

May I be able to sift through all I read to find the gems of your kingdom.

Lord, I long not for the wisdom that leads to power or fortune but the wisdom that leads to faith and love.

Guide my pathway as I thirst for your truths.

May I drink from your word and pour out this heavenly water on others.

Your water of life, faith, hope, truth and love, into the hearts and lives of all I meet.

Amen.

It is written in Matthew 18:3, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

So I thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the words of a child, Elliott, in his letter to God.

“Dear God, I think about you sometimes, even when I’m not praying.”

Thank you and God Bless.