

Patterns of Grace and Gratitude Week 5

Tuesday, May 11



Photo credit: Hanna Fenstermaker “Hanna’s Community” (look at her smile!)

Scripture: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10

Thoughts from Hanna Fenstermaker for today: Ever since I was little, I struggled with anxiety and an unrealistic expectation of perfection in everything that I did. These feelings often expressed themselves as tears that I couldn’t find the words to explain. As I grew up, I sought perfection athletically, academically, musically, and relationally. For a large portion of my life, I was able to convince myself that I was actually achieving to a high enough level. I found my worth in my success, and I defined success apart from my relationship with the Lord.

My senior year of high school, my unhealthy behavior reached a peak. On the surface, my life looked just about picture perfect. I was a captain of the varsity soccer team, president of my acapella group, and graduated at the top of my class. Underneath all these things, I was struggling. I suffered from what was diagnosed as anxiety, depression, and an eating disorder during the summer after I graduated.

Going into college, I continued to have strong urges to find worth in success. I was able to overcome my eating disorder, but I continued to find my identity in academic success and in unhealthy relationships. While I had lots of fun and my grades were good, at the end of my first year of college I felt alone and unfulfilled. With COVID-19 sending everyone home, I had a lot of time to reflect on the past few years of my life.

It was at this point when I decided that the missing peace in my life was the Lord. I have always considered myself a Christian, but I had never truly experienced what life could be like in a community centered around Christ. Over quarantine, a church on campus utilized online resources and relentlessly pursued and loved one another. I was able to get connected to the community, and I grew more in faith over that summer than I even thought possible.

Now another year older, I can see how God was shaping my life and ultimately pointing me towards him. Life is far from perfect, but I feel so blessed to be surrounded by other college students who make it their priority to run hard after Jesus. I still think my schoolwork and staying active are important and I

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value my friendships, but I understand now that my identity is not in these things. My worth is hidden with Christ. I am a daughter of the Lord and his definition of success differs greatly from this world's broken idea of success. I don't have to earn his love or his grace. In fact, there is nothing I could do to earn his grace. We are simply not worthy of such a gift! All I have to do is surrender and follow him. This is easy to say, but harder to do. Even still, I am excited to spend the rest of my life in pursuit of a good, loving, gracious God.

***Prayer:** Lord, we are so incredibly thankful for your heart towards us. On this side of heaven we will never be able to fully comprehend your capacity for grace and love. Help us to not find our worth in things of this world. Set our eyes on you, and help us to see ourselves and others with the same eyes that you see us. We are so broken and no amount of success can change that. We are so blessed that you seek us out even in our brokenness. Please help those of us suffering with anxiety and perfectionism to admit that we aren't perfect and that we are not meant to be. We are made beautifully in your image, as you perfectly designed. Help us to let go of our false sense of control. We love you so much. In your name we pray, Amen.*