June 7

ABCs for Faith

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).

Scripture: Proverbs 1:1-4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 20-22, 32, 33
Song: “Behold Our God”

Anteaters to zebras—alphabet books help children enjoy learning their ABCs. These colorful books can now be found on every subject, from dinosaurs to outer space. But few alphabet books have ever reached the popularity of the New England Primer. First published in Boston in the late 1600s, millions of copies had been sold by the 1800s. There were even translations into Native American languages. This small black-and-white book used rhyming couplets for each letter. Many of the couplets contained spiritual truths, such as man’s sin and Christ’s death for sinners, so children learned about God as they learned their letters. The Primer included the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and other verses from the Bible that children would read as their skills improved.

The book of Proverbs tells us that knowledge begins when we recognize the truth that we owe reverence, honor, and glory to the Lord, our Creator. The colonists understood this and believed that everyone should learn to read so they could read the Bible.

Acknowledging this truth helps us thank God for the gift of language, marvel at God’s creativity in nature, and appreciate His orderness in creation. We also see God’s hand in history in His care for His people and the preservation of His Word and witness.

Father, help us see that a knowledge of You as the Creator of the universe, the world, and all it contains must be the true foundation of our lives and our learning. In Jesus’ name, amen.
Spiritual Patina

If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently (Galatians 6:1).

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10
Song: “Something Beautiful”

Seasoned antique shoppers attach value to items with a distinctive patina. This word is for various signs of distress that characterize old, well-used belongings. Some pay considerably more for a vintage dresser with minor bumps and scratches than they would for a brand-new piece of furniture. For these buyers, such items tell a story, and ownership offers a chance to become part of that story.

As we navigate temptations, we acquire a kind of spiritual patina—life “blemishes” that tell the story of how God has graciously used past failures to grow us as disciples. Christians know that there is something beautiful about redeemed brokenness, which is why Paul emphasizes that we mustn’t simply discard people who have fallen into sin. Instead, we gently come alongside to help them overcome and grow out of their weakness with God’s restoration.

Many antique collectors literally restore the pieces they buy, skillfully rebuilding and preserving them against future wear. And that’s what the ministry of reconciliation can do for us. It can help us repair relationships and strengthen one another against future temptation—so that whatever scratches and dents we pick up in life become signposts of God’s amazing grace.

Merciful God, thank You for restoring me. Help me be Your agent of restoration for others. Amen.
June 9

Just Browsing

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us (Romans 15:4).

Scripture: Romans 15:1-6
Song: “Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak”

I enjoy browsing the tool section at the hardware store, even when I’m not looking to buy anything. I walk up and down the aisles, examining power tool accessories and specialty hand tools, learning their proper names so I can go online and view how-to videos showing the work they’re designed to do. Besides satisfying a hobbyist’s curiosity, it helps me appreciate the wide array of resources available for tackling odd jobs around the house.

I take a similar approach to personal Bible study. From time to time, I enjoy exploring the Scriptures systematically—a whole book at a time—precisely because there are many interesting parts of God’s Word that rarely make it into a sermon or small-group lesson. I like discovering (and rediscovering) lesser-known portions of Scripture because, as Paul reminds us, all were written for our instruction and encouragement. Browsing unfamiliar stories and passages reminds me of the many different situations God has used in the past to reveal himself.

Reading my Bible “this way equips me the same way that browsing the tool section at the hardware store does—by giving me the confidence I need to select the right tool for the job. When we become familiar with the whole of God’s Word, we can more effectively speak and apply His wisdom in all circumstances.

Marvelous God, the riches of Your wisdom are inexhaustible. Give me a desire to know Your Word completely. In Jesus’ name, amen.
Preventing Infestation

Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for (2 John 8).

Scripture: 2 John 4-11
Song: “God of Grace and God of Glory”

Texas leaf-cutting ants are a real problem where I live. They don’t bite, but they do wreak havoc on my yard, killing trees and destabilizing the soil. They’re difficult to detect, too, because they live in underground tunnels with inconspicuous entrances. Often the first sign of infestation comes quickly because of a bare tree in the yard—with a trail of foliage leading to a small hole about 10 feet away.

False teaching has a similar way of quietly infiltrating our congregations and undermining the authority of the gospel. In our desire for warmth and congeniality with other believers, we sometimes avoid asking difficult questions or we shun controversial subjects. Over time, we may begin to compromise on important issues like what we believe about Jesus, accommodating ourselves to popular cultural messaging instead. Eventually, we may forget many of the distinctive teachings of the Bible altogether.

Conventional pesticides don’t kill leaf-cutting ants, but consistently treating their holes forces them to relocate. This frustrates their progress and keeps them from getting out of control. Perhaps our approach to dealing with false teaching should be the same. We can’t eliminate the worldly ideas that come into the church, but if we’re diligent about examining them against the truth of God’s Word—and naming falsehood for what it is—we can help prevent infestation.

Father, let Your Word expose the false teachings of this world. Give me the courage to speak Your truth in love. In Jesus’ name, amen.
Playing the Part

“No one is greater in this house than I am” (Genesis 39:9).

Scripture: Genesis 39:6b-18
Song: “O Jesus, I Have Promised”

I studied musical acoustics in college, and learned that sound is more directional at higher frequencies. This is one reason a high-pitched flute solo pierces through an orchestra, demanding listeners’ attention even when dozens of other musicians are playing. But there’s a caveat: The directional nature of high-frequency sound also explains why audiences notice more quickly when musicians playing higher-pitched instruments make mistakes. In music, as in life, it seems that higher parts come with higher standards.

This is something Joseph certainly appreciated when he was entrusted with the care of his master’s estate. He had a high part to play in Potiphar’s household, and any mistake he made could have disastrous effects—for himself and the people under his care. Recognizing his moral vulnerability, Joseph took precautions to safeguard himself from temptation, enabling him to flee from sexual sin in a situation where others might have succumbed.

In an orchestra, higher-pitched instruments often get more exciting and melodic parts to play, but the musicians assigned to them have to practice diligently to avoid making mistakes. As Christians, we should remember that spiritual leadership entails similar responsibility. The higher God calls us to serve in His household, the more earnestly we need to pursue personal holiness—lest we become stumbling blocks for those depending on us.

Gracious Father, I’m grateful for the opportunity to serve Your people. Guard me from temptation, so that my life glorifies You. In Jesus’ name, amen.
Finding My Bearings

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men (Proverbs 2:12).

Scripture: Proverbs 2:12-19
Song: “Thy Word”

In Boy Scouts we learned a useful trick for finding your bearings without a compass. You locate a sunny spot and jam a stick into the ground, placing a mark where the tip of its shadow falls. After about 20 minutes, the shadow will have moved eastward—even if only a tiny bit. By placing a second mark where the tip of the new shadow falls and drawing a line between the two marks, you can get a pretty good idea of east and west, even in an unfamiliar place with few landmarks.

I think about that sometimes when I find myself in morally ambiguous situations in life. There are times when the world seems to celebrate something that my conscience tells me I ought to treat with caution. Likewise, there are times when the world suggests I ought to reject thoughts and feelings that my conscience tells me are from the Lord. It can be difficult to discern truth from falsehood unless I’m willing to stop and examine things against the unchanging wisdom of God’s Word.

The stick-and-shadow trick works because the sun always moves in the same direction. You can reliably figure out a stationary object’s orientation by observing how its shadow moves over time. The same is true when I prayerfully observe questionable situations from a distance, against the steady light of God’s truth. Over time, it becomes increasingly clear which direction I need to go.

God, I don’t trust my sense of direction. Help me find my bearings in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.
June 13

Root Cause Analysis

Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips (Proverbs 4:24).

Scripture: Proverbs 2:20-22; 4:24-27
Song: “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

At work, when customers return a defective product, our quality manager performs a “root cause analysis.” After examining the product and defining the nature of the defect, he thoroughly investigates possible sources of contamination and procedural failure that may have contributed to it. Sometimes it’s a minor oversight. Other times it’s a systemic issue requiring drastic intervention. Either way, management needs this information in order to implement appropriate corrective action.

Unholy language is one of the more common “defects” that can manifest in a Christian’s life. Cussing, vulgar expressions, and obscene conversation are habits for some, but the Bible says that these are unbecoming for a person born of the Spirit. Our words reflect our character, which is why we’re encouraged to watch our language—not merely to stop using inappropriate words, but to invite the Spirit to do “root cause analysis” on our hearts and bring about corrective action.

The quality manager’s scrutiny usually makes employees pay closer attention to their work, and that leads to fewer defects. The same is true when we submit to the Spirit’s conviction about the way we talk. When we watch our tongues, we begin to pay much closer attention to our hearts, and that draws us closer to Christ.

Heavenly Father, purify my heart so that the words I speak will lead others to You.
In Jesus’ name, amen.