

Paula Dirksen
March 26, 2010

Good Morning everyone! As I look back on my past four years at Augustana, I am filled with so many memories. Memories of joy, memories of pain, and many times of finding ways to procrastinate and distract myself from doing homework. I learned quite quickly that college would be a time to ask questions whether or not they were answered; a time to answer questions and all this would result in a time to grow. I was pretty fortunate when I came to college. I entered, as a freshman intending to major in Business and minor in history. Once I realized that you could pretty much build your own major with an Interdepartmental I added the major with areas in history, theatre, and computer information systems. Figuring and planning this schedule was not the easiest task, but I was able to make it all work and combine many interests.

When I was starting to think about what I wanted my sermon to focus on and which scriptures to use I was immediately drawn to Philippians for Saint Paul's words of encouragement and moving on. In some ways I have been a typical college student I would want to socialize instead of study, I would think about and plan of all the far away places I wanted to explore, but usually had to stay on solid ground right here in South Dakota on a college student's budget. Another similarity college students as well as everyone else will face many times in their life is feeling stressed and worried. We all struggle and I for one will many times let the stress and worry get the best of me. Isaiah 40: 30-31 says "Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint."

So many times during our lives we get discouraged with too much homework, feeling overwhelmed by our extra activities, work, and not getting enough sleep. We start to worry if we are going to get things done on time or for some, it will be whether or not we will have the money we need to purchase things we want or even need. People young and old feel stress. In these verses it tells us to be patient and God will give us strength. Paul writes in Philippians that we need to forget the things in our past and reach forth unto those things that are in front of us. All the times I have been stressed or have worried, which unfortunately happens often, those times are in the past. Whether it is a long week with lots of assignments due or not, I have always made it through. I usually look back on that week and realize that I should not have been worried so much. It is human nature that we all get worked up about the little things in life and some of them are out of our control. Stressing out for an event or a short period of time will always pass and we can all move on. When I get stressed I am usually told to take a deep breath and to say a few prayers. I do follow my mother's advice and yes it does help. God does take away my worries and helps me through the stressful times. It is just like Paul said, rejoice in the Lord always and lift up your worries to God. He will give you the strength.

There have been certain times in my life where I have felt closer to God. Having the chance to travel to different places in the world is one of those times. When I travel I experience a sense of peace and it helps me to forget about my stress and everyday

worries. I have a great passion to travel. My parents started this habit when I was young. I have traveled to England and Wales with my family. The summer after freshman year I spent a month in Russia and the fall semester of my junior year, I spent in Athens, Greece and even took a side trip to Egypt. Each place has a very different culture and history. College is very similar. We come in as freshmen, not knowing who we will meet, how our interests may change, or that we would be standing here before friends, family and faculty sharing a little part of our journey. One of the benefits of studying abroad, besides spending money and eating great food, is the chance to explore new scenery. Places in Greece are mentioned all through out the Bible. It was kind of crazy to tour the ancient cities and areas of Corinth, Crete, and Thessalonica, to see the ruins of once great cities. Not much is left in some of these places but broken statues, fallen columns and museums containing artifacts.

I must say that my favorite spot to go and think while in Greece was on top of Aeropagus Hill or according to my roommates and I, Paul's Rock. This is where St. Paul preached to the Athenian monks and the people of Athens. It is located just below the Acropolis. On a nice night it was very peaceful to climb up there and be above the heavy traffic and noise and to look out and see the lights of Athens. I could see history meet present. It was on this hill that I found peace with myself and did not worry about daily life. I found a connection with God and was thankful for all that he had provided for me. For most of my trip, my memories were things of joy and adventure. I was discovering new interests and I had time to just sit back and enjoy my surroundings. I did not have a cell phone over there so when I left the apartment I could just take a walk and clear my head. I would sometimes imagine people in the Bible taking the same paths and would wonder what they would think about.

The night before I flew back to the states, I had planned to climb up Paul's rock one last time with a few friends and on the way back buy a gyro for the last time before I returned to the apartment to finish packing. The evening was off to a good start. Two friends and I walked up to Paul's rock taking a few pictures on the way and when we reached the top, we found a nice place to sit. We reminisced about the past three months and how much we would miss seeing each other and being in Athens. The rest of the evening did not go as planned. As we were on our walk back to the apartment two Greeks stopped us. To skip some details, the end result was the three of us being robbed at knifepoint about 5 mins from our apartment. The only thing I had on me was my camera and my memory cards. I had spent 3 months in another country without losing anything, which is pretty good for me, and in only 6 hours before I fly back home, I lose my camera.

When something like this happens, your mind freezes and you hope and pray that everyone stays safe. Luckily for us no one was hurt. It was not until my flight home that my mind started to think about worse case scenario. This train of thought will not get you anywhere. We sometimes want to focus on the bad things in our lives instead of the good. I walked away unharmed and yes I lost my camera, but I had the majority of my pictures uploaded to my computer. My camera and memory cards were not the only things in my camera bag. Before I went out that night I put some index cards in my camera bag and written on those cards were Bible verses that my mom had given me

before I left home. They were verses of inspiration and encouragement. One such verse was Philippians 4:6, which is one of my favorite verses. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." This is something I struggle with frequently, but God always finds a way to calm me down. I can only pray that the two people that robbed me did not just throw away those Bible verses, but did read them and maybe they were influential.

God does not give us more than we can handle. Allowing stress to enter our lives prevents us from embracing all that God has created. We all struggle with stress and worries. Giving all your worries over to God is a lesson I am still trying to learn. God will take care of our needs and we will continue to grow along life's journey. I will end my message with the famous poem by Mary Stevenson that most of you know entitled "Footprints in the Sand." This poem helps remind me that what Paul was saying in Philippians is true and that we are never alone to fight our battles. God is always there.

"Footprints in the Sand"

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord,

"You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you."