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The Main Thing Devotional

Chaplain's Office

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Never Leaving or Forsaking

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The Main Thing: Never Leaving or Forsaking

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” - Deuteronomy 31:6

Meaningful relationships are best embodied when one is physically present while not being emotionally absent.

If you have ever vacationed on a cruise ship, you know it can be a great way to spend lots of quality time with friends and loved ones. Being on a cruise ship with family should entail everyone experiencing a time of relaxation, but for some families it can be a time of tearful tension. A heartbreaking conversation between a 10-year-old boy and his mother took place near the pool of a large cruise liner. "But why, Mom," the boy asked, oblivious to all those around him. "Why did he even bother to come?" Everyone around could see his mother struggle to frame her answer. "Well," she said, "he's here and he paid for all of us to go on this trip." Her son then shouted, "He's not here! He's been on his phone or on his computer the whole time!" Our heart naturally goes out to the son. On a cruise you physically cannot be any closer to your own family than spending seven days in a tiny cabin out at sea, yet the boy experienced the pain of having a dad being physically present but emotionally absent. You do not have to be a 10-year-old boy to experience the pain of emotional absence.

In Deuteronomy 31:6, God spoke to His people and encouraged them to not be afraid for He will never leave them or forsake them. When reading this verse in English, the word *forsake* can seem redundant since it is preceded by the word *leave*. Why would God repeat His words here, why would He say, "I will never *leave* you nor *forsake* you?" Is there an apparent difference? Yes, there is! The word used for *leave* in Hebrew is *rafa*, which denotes the idea of abandonment. The Hebrew word for *forsake* is *azab*, which denotes the idea of neglect.^[1] Scholars have suggested that God will neither withdraw His *presence* ("never leave thee") nor His *help* ("nor forsake thee") from His people.^[2] Could it be that in this verse we discover a God who not only promises His physical presence but also His emotional provision? A God who is both on the boat with us *and* emotionally comforts us during the storm.

Perhaps the reason God promises His physical and emotional support is He knew we would go through times where we would be deprived of both. There are some who have a spouse that is physically present but emotionally absent, others may have a parent that provides for their physical needs but does not have time to offer emotional support. You yourself may experience this in your job, your classes, your friendships or even your own relationship with God – you are present physically but absent emotionally or spiritually.

One of the greatest gifts you can receive from a friend, student, parent, spouse, professor, or staff member is their personal and emotional presence – those in our lives who never leave or forsake us! The same is true for us, we can be that same gift for someone else.

Recently, Campus Ministries participated in Ministry Market, a yearly event held at the beginning of the semester where various organizations invite students to serve their local community. You may have seen it at the Hulsey Wellness Center parking lot, which was beautifully transformed with spectacular lights, creative booth decorations and most significantly, the advancement of worthy

causes. Upon reflection, Ministry Market was an opportunity for our campus family to not just be present physically this year, but to also be emotionally present to those God has called us to serve.

Whatever the enemy may be throwing your way, take courage and do not be afraid. The God we serve promises to never leave us or forsake us! Ellen White writes, "But if we trust in God, He will never leave nor forsake us. Under all circumstances we may have firm trust in God, that He will never leave nor forsake us while we preserve our integrity."^[3]

Reflection

What areas in your life do you need not only someone's presence, but also desire their emotional support? Are you finding yourself emotionally withdrawing from your friends, family, responsibilities or even God? Grab a piece of paper and on one side, write where you are lacking emotional support and on the other side, where you are emotionally withdrawing. See if the same areas you are needing emotional support are also the same areas you have emotionally withdrawn. If so, how can you be strong and courageous in areas where God is asking you to support the place, person or perspective that you feel He has forsaken? The reality is, we cannot fix what we forsake.

Prayer

God, thank you for promising to never leave me nor forsake me, especially when I feel most weak and fearful. Forgive me for emotionally withdrawing from others including my own family and even You. During such times give me the courage to face the things I have forsaken. I choose to rest in your sovereign control, trusting in your unfailing love for me.

NEWS AND RESOURCES

- **Prayer at Flagpole:** Every morning from 8:15-8:30 (M-F), students, faculty and staff gather to specifically pray for an end to any racial division within our nation, church and campus. For more information, feel free to contact Stephanie Guster at sguster@southern.edu.
- **LifeGroups for Faculty and Staff:** LifeGroups are not only for students. If you are a faculty or staff member who would like to lead a LifeGroup, why not take the next step today by clicking on the link: southern.edu/lifegroups. Scroll to the middle of the screen then click, "lead a life group." Once we have LifeGroup leaders, others will then be able to join the LifeGroup by clicking on the "join a life group" link. Feel free to contact Chaplain [Anna Bennett](#) if you have any questions about starting or joining a LifeGroup.
- Share your prayer requests or praises with us via text message using your mobile phone. **Text-to-Pray: 423-281-8996.**
- While we cannot meet in person because of physical distancing restrictions, we encourage you to make an appointment to **talk online** with Chaplain [Anna Bennett](#) or [Joseph Khabbaz](#) if you need someone to pray with or have a desire to grow spiritually.