

## CONFIRMATION 2015

The dog lover, the dancer, the softball star, and the football player all got together to talk about the future. The dog-lover said to the football player. "Are you looking forward to the future?" The football player said, "I on de fense. Sometimes all my goals seem achievable. Other times, however, they seem to float in the air like a rocket ship that just can't touch down." The dog lover replied, "Yip, I know what you mean. Some days you can't tell whether its heads or tails. I'm always looking for some good pointers."

A similar conversation took place between the dancer and the softball star. The dancer declared, "I'm not sure a question about the future is relevee. It's like throwing a pir o wet socks on the present. You gotta live in the here and now." "I don't know," said the softball star. "I'm in it for the long ball. While I want to touch all the bases now, I also don't want to be so focused on the present that I'm not ready for the things that might pop up in the future."

Okay, that's just silliness. However, before us we do have a dog-lover, a dancer, a softball star and a football player who are making pledges and promises concerning their spiritual future. And each one has chosen a verse as a guide for their lives. And for each one, I have chosen a special hymn to celebrate them as sheep in God's flock and servants in God's kingdom.

I am excited that they have been instructed in the faith and are ready to stand before God and His people to confirm the vows that were said for them at their baptism, and which now they wish to speak for themselves. Aren't you?

So let's start with Alec. Alec the dog-lover. Alec chose:

The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. Ps 145:18

So Alec -- you have been distant from us for nearly a year, now. Every time the class has gotten together, you have joined us via Skype on my iPad from Costa Rica. And very prominent in your skyping has been that constant companion and friend of yours that that has been making his way prominently on the screen -- Spike, your dog. Isn't that right guys -- Alec is always reminding us that Spike is by his side. What kind of dog is he again, Alec?

Spike is close to you and offers the personal touch -- we have been far away. But sometimes, back when you were here and Spike was at home during Confirmation, Spike has been in another place, and we have been close.

Isn't it nice to have someone to be close to -- whose physical presence and personal friendship is right there, all the time -- day after day, week after week, month after month. Isn't that one of the reason why you love Spike? As a dog-handler, I know that's one of the reason why many people love to pet Lila, our Comfort Dog.

Your verse today, Alec, reminds you that, even more than the personal presence of any person or any creature, the God to whom you pledge to today is a God who promises to be with you wherever you go. Whether you feel great or whether you are hurting -- whether you have life by the tail or whether life has thrown you a few curve balls -- whether you are standing in line for a ride at a Wisconsin water park or lounging in your bedroom in sunny Costa Rica, the God of the Universe sent Jesus Christ to be your Savior. And when He won your personal freedom from sin, death and the devil on the cross of Calvary, He declared to you that He will never leave or forsake you. His presence is as close as a simple prayer, and His body and blood are offered to you as His physical touch to strengthen and sustain you.

Life sometimes has lonely moments -- days when it's hard to believe that anyone cares, that anyone is in our corner, that anyone is thinking about us in the middle of a busy world. Don't ever be fooled by that lie, Alec. As your verse says, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him -- to all who call on Him in truth.

For Alec I chose "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

Let's move on to Julie Schneider. Julie the dancer. Julie chose

Rom 12:9-21 from which I chose this verse: 11Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Julie, one thing I love about you -- but have teased you about constantly -- is your zest for dancing. Over and over again, I see you going up on your toes, or flexing them at least, with the sense that you might, even in the middle of class, go pirouetting off into the distance. Isn't that true, class?

Dancing is about energy -- it's about joy -- it's about feeling the music, and moving your body to the rhythms and beats and tones. It's about being so filled with enthusiasm, that you just can't keep still. When the people of Israel crossed through the Red Sea on dry ground and the watched as their enemies, in hot pursuit, were drown as the waters crashed in upon them -- Moses' sister Miriam grabbed a tambourine and leapt for joy singing in praise to God for His great victory. Similarly, when King David brought the Ark of the Covenant into the city of Jerusalem for the first time, he jumped up and down in joyous tribute of the presence of God coming into the capitol. When Peter and John heal a man who has been lame from birth, it says that his response was walking and leaping and praising God.

Being a Christian, Julie, can be a little bit like that. And here's why. Because the victory God won on the cross is not just any old victory -- it's YOUR victory. God sent Jesus to take away all YOUR sins. God sent Jesus to win YOUR battle with every evil enemy. God sent Jesus to help you with YOUR struggles and trials -- to be YOUR Savior as you journey through this life.

The world will want to steal your joy. It will want to get you bogged down in fear, in doubt, in anger, in jealousy. It will want you to become sullen and sad about disappointments and losses and failures and faults.

But Jesus says to you, Julie, that you can rise above all that when you hold onto the God who loves you. He says, "11Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." For Julie I chose, "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" which has the great line, "May Thy rich grace impart, strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire...."

Now let's move on to Katherine Schoessow. Katherine, the softball star. Katherine chose Luke 1:37 For with God, nothing shall be impossible.

Katherine, as a softball hitter and as a pitcher, you know that every time you come up to the plate, you got somebody who stares you down and says, "You will not get a hit on my watch." That's the pitcher. And when you're the pitcher, it's your job to stare down the batter and again declare, "I got you. I will beat you with my fastball, or curveball, or slider." You know what that's like, right? You need to step up to the plate (or the mound) with confidence and believe that you can do it -- that you can win -- that you can triumph against the opponent. But every time you do, the opponent will be doing the same against you.

I remember one time standing in the back yard of my brother-in-laws and hearing some of my nephews taunting my softball-playing niece about how they could surely get a hit off of a girl. So four of them, aged 15 to 23 took her on. And you know what, she breezed the ball right by them or made them foul. Each one struck out.

Thousands of years ago, in the Garden of Eden, the message rang out about all humankind. The Devil stared us down and said, "You are lost and condemned. Unsavable. Unable to be transformed from your fallen-ness and sinfulness to be a people that would ever have a relationship with the perfect Creator again." Satan laughed because he had tempted Adam and Eve to sin, and he thought he had won the victory against the God who had ousted him from the heavenly realms by tarnishing the crown of His creation.

But on a quiet night in the year 5 or 6 BC, an angel came down to an ordinary, sinful woman named Mary and declared the fulfillment of God's plan of victory first voiced as a curse to the serpent: "One is coming who will crush the head of the Serpent." The virgin Mary would give birth to a Son. That Son, would be the Son of God. That Son would knock the ball out of the park by dying our death, paying our ransom, and crossing home plate by rising from the dead. "Nothing is impossible with God," said the angel. And indeed, nothing was.

In the years ahead, Katherine, you are sure to face many obstacles and barriers. Seeming impossibilities are a reality of life. Troubles, hardships, pains and problems are part and parcel of our sinful world. In those days, please remember your Bible verse and what it means. "Nothing is impossible with God." Trust in Him and He will be with you -- forever.

For Katherine I have chosen the hymn: "See this Wonder." I pray it reminds her of the power of faith as it declares, concerning baptism, "Miracle each time it happens, as the door to heaven opens, and the Father beams 'beloved' - heir of gifts a king would covet.

And finally we have Kyle Spivey. Kyle the Football player. Kyle's verse is the very famous John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Kyle, you and I share a great love of Packers football. I'm sure we could sit around and play armchair quarterbacks as we watch the team drive downfield or defend its end zone. We could high-five each other at good plays and crab at the TV when things went sour.

You however, have a passion I do not share: playing football. Oh, there's no doubt that I'm willing to throw the ball around and enjoy some time outside. But quite honestly, I'm not willing to go the extra step that it takes for real, actual, tackle football, -- being willing to push and shove and be thrown to the ground --twisting your body in ways it wasn't meant to go, taking hits from people larger and stronger than you. That takes a certain commitment to the game that I am not willing to give. But you are. And as you do, you are learning something very important. Sacrifice. You sacrifice your body and give of yourself so that the team is able to succeed. Football is all about sacrifice. Am I right? It's kind of like being a soldier, who stands on that battlefield to protect his country -- willing to give it all.

In today's world most people are more concerned about what they can get -- most people are focused so much on receiving, having, prospering - that they have little time to consider sacrificing their time, treasure, or talent to assist in ways that have no payback. All kinds of organizations which once depended on generosity are faltering and failing because of this selfish world we live in.

The passage you chose as a guide for your life, however, shows us that our God in even a greater way than a football player or battlefield soldier, was willing to sacrifice everything so that we could be saved. It meant that the all powerful One who deserved all glory, honor and praise, had to lower Himself to become one of us. It meant that He had to submit to the kings of this world, be rejected by His people, and suffer and die one of the most brutal tortures mankind has known.

This was what was required to win us back from the clutches of the enemy. Nothing less would accomplish our freedom and our eternity. So that's what God give: His only begotten Son.

Kyle, as you consider your verse, and as you climb out onto the playing field of life, I pray that God will continue to develop a heart in you that can see the work that needs to be done and is willing to offer yourself to make it happen.

Think of those early disciples who loved Jesus so much that they were willing to go all throughout the world and face persecution and death so that they could tell others the Good News of God's love. Jesus is calling you to be His disciple too. May His Holy Spirit fill you with the energy and passion to make a difference for Him. "For God so loved Kyle that He gave His only Son for Kyle, that when Kyle believes in Him, Kyle will not perish, but Kyle will have everlasting life."

The hymn I chose for you is All Hail the Pow'r of Jesus Name. Note the second verse talks about the sacrifice: "Sinners whose love can ne'er forget the wormwood and the gall. Go spread your trophies at His feet and crown Him Lord of all."

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So there you have it. The dog-love who is promised a God who draws near to His people. The dancer, who is promised great joy as she is connected to Him who loved her. The softball star, who is promised a God who can conquer anything. And the football player, who sacrificial Savior enables him to reach out in generosity toward others.

May God bless you all as you serve Him. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.