



Higher Thoughts

Have you ever opened the Word of God and felt like a particular verse(s) written exactly for the situation or circumstance in which you found yourself? It was as if God Himself looked at your last 24 hours, week, or month and penned those words to speak straight to your heart and mind. Maybe you were struggling with something you couldn't share with anyone. You turned to God's Word and 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you," was exactly the message you needed to hear from God. Or you thought you could not possibly forgive that person who let you down for the umpteenth time and the verses of the day on your Bible app were Matthew 18:21-22, when Jesus addressed forgiveness and said, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."



Has God ever revealed His Word to you like this? What was the verse and how did it influence **you**?

I remember experiencing this blessing when I was at one of my lowest times. I was sitting in the office of my licensed Christian counselor going over some current struggles related to a recent diagnosis of obsessive rumination. He was trying to explain to me exactly what that meant without using medical jargon. He said it is like a cow chewing the cud. I made a mental note to look into that more when I got home.

Maybe you, too, are a city gal and not familiar with all things cows. Cows spend up to eight hours of every day chewing their cud. Cows must chew and swallow their food twice in order to properly digest it through the four compartments of their stomachs. So, they spend a lot of their day chewing and re-chewing their food.

After learning this I was able

to understand the connection Tony was making between my thoughts and a cow's cud. I often would get stuck on a particular topic and literally think it to death. I would imagine every hypothetical outcome and then think about multiple ways I would handle each of potential outcome. Or, I would replay the situation over and over again in my mind analyzing it to the smallest entity I could imagine. I would ruminate on situations and possibilities as long as a cow chews her cud.

I remember looking up the word "thoughts" in the Bible and working my way through 53 references, until I read Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your

ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." I cannot begin to explain the peace that came over me when I read these two verses. It was as if God sat down beside me and said, "Sarah, I know you have been

thinking about these circumstances for a while and it feels overwhelming. But don't worry, I have thought about them, too, and know that My thoughts and ways are far greater than your thoughts."



What do you spend a lot of time thinking about?

How does the truth of Isaiah 55:8-9 affect those thoughts?

Verse 8 touches on the greatness of God's mercy and grace. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary expounds on this, "The grace of God surpasses human understanding..." Oh, what a relief that God's grace surpasses

what we can understand. God's grace is far greater than humanity's example of this (Matthew 7:11). Our thoughts are not His thoughts, and our ways are not His ways, because His thoughts and ways are MUCH MORE.



List two examples of when God has given you MUCH MORE than you ever imagined.

- 1.

- 2.

Another part of Isaiah 55:8-9 I lean on is the difference God makes when comparing His thoughts and ways to ours. For someone who spent many years taking medicine to slow down excessive thinking, the promise in these verses is rather comforting. While I know it is not possible to get an exact example of this difference, I want to share with you a glimpse of this difference. Earth is part of the Milky Way galaxy. The closest major galaxy that is similar in size and shape is the Andromeda Galaxy (M31), which is located 2.537 million light years from Earth. A light year is nearly 6 trillion miles. 2.537 million multiplied by 6 trillion equals A LONG WAY, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. God is omniscient! "For as the heavens are higher than the earth..." God not only thinks about you a lot, His ways are so far beyond our imaginations.



What do the space example and the illustration in Psalm 139:17-18 have in common?

How do these verses affect your daily life?

I love the story of Joseph because there are many great lessons to glean from his life. I also find his life to be a great representation of God's message to us in Isaiah 55:8-9. Joseph is highly favored in his father's eyes as well as his own. He quickly finds himself sold into slavery. God does not lose sight of Joseph though. I am certain it was "God's way" for him to end up in the home of Potiphar, where he again finds favor. In spite of doing the right thing Joseph ends up in jail. "But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21). It was no coincidence Joseph was in *that* prison at *that* time.

Many years before, God knew a famine was coming and He was going to use Joseph to provide for His chosen people. I love what he tells his brothers in Genesis 45:5, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." I

highly doubt that when Joseph was a young boy showing off his colorful coat he would have chosen betrayal, slavery, wrongful accusation, and prison to be the talking points of his life. God uses blow after blow to lay the path for a knockout win for the children of Israel because God's ways are higher than ours are.



Have you ever faced unwanted circumstances? How did God's ways show His glory?

Can you think of another person in the Bible whose life was an example of Isaiah 55:8-9?

There are examples within WNAC's history that exemplify Isaiah 55:8-9. Our contributions, ideas, and thoughts have contributed to some of Free Will Baptists' biggest organizations and events, such as Vertical Three, IM, and *Shine!* Don't you just love how a simple idea turns into something bigger than you imagined when God is in control?

In 1935, a group of women

felt the need to be a part of the Great Commission on an international level. They were part of the General Conference of Free Will Baptists meeting at the Black Jack Church in Pitt County, North Carolina. "With \$150 from the treasury and an additional \$85 from a freewill offering, Laura Belle Barnard left her Georgia roots, crossed the Atlantic, and set foot on South India's soil" (*Into*

the Darkness, 16; Sparks Into Flame, 32).

Laura Belle Barnard is well known as the first missionary for IM. This Free Will Baptist organization has grown from one woman with \$235 to a multi-million dollar budget with missionaries and partners all over the world. We had our ideas; our “ways” of how we would like to see God work in this area, but praise God His ways are higher than ours!

WNAC began essay and declamation contests for the youth. Then, in 1962, WNAC and the Free Will Baptist League sponsored a teen banquet and youth rally at the national convention. These contests, banquets, and rallies continue today.

Formerly known as FWB League, CTS, and National Youth Conference, Vertical Three has contributed to thousands of young people learning God’s Word, developing ministry skills such as Truth & Peace and other engaging opportunities for Free Will Baptist youth. Again, I say, praise God. His ways are higher than ours!

In the fall of 2014, the WNAC leadership sat around a table in Nashville, Tennessee, and dreamed about the future expansion of WNAC. The conver-

sation started with this simple idea, “If money were no obstacle, what would you like to see us do?” From that discussion, *Shine!* was born. In 2015, Free Will Baptist Foundation awarded a grant allowing this dream to become reality.



Shine! is a conference for girls (12-18), their moms, and youth leaders. At these conferences, we tackle tough issues girls face with scriptural truths and practical solutions for these challenges. We come alongside moms and youth leaders and help them see the world to which their girls are exposed because of life and technology. We provide resources and encourage them with the truths found in God’s Word.

Although *Shine!* conferences have been few the lives reached are immeasurable. We are excited to see how God’s ways continue to soar high above the vision discussed around the table that day.




How is your local WAC group contributing to God's ways?

*"Standing on the promises, I cannot fall.
List'ning every moment to the Spirit's call.
Resting in my Savior as my all in all.
Standing on the promises of God."*

When Russell Carter penned these lyrics in 1886, I'm not sure he had Isaiah 55:8-9 in mind, however, I can't help but think of them. When struggling with out-of-control thoughts, the sheer idea of resting in *our Savior as our all in all* is incredibly comforting because His ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

Psalm 61:1-2 

About the Writer: Sarah Sargent graduated from Ohio State University in 2006. A third-generation member and leader in WNAC, she has been active at all levels of WNAC since an early age. In 2013, she began serving on the WNAC board and also serves as president of her local and state WAC. Sarah is actively involved in Reynoldsburg FWB Church where her father pastors. She is also the proud owner of Regal, a chocolate labradoodle.