

Good morning! My name is Christina Rudolph, and I have been a member of St Timothy's since I was just two years old. I am active in the youth group and consider St. Tim's my second home. I have gone on two mission trips and am going on my third one to Belfast, Maine this coming summer. I am 17 years old and a junior at ThunderRidge.

I am so excited that I have been given the opportunity to speak with you all today. I feel very passionate about what the scriptures are telling us.

I think that everyone envisions God differently, because every person has their own, unique relationship with Him. When writing this talk, a clip from one of my all time favorite movies came to mind. In the classic movie "Talladega Knights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby", there is a scene when the family is at dinner and they say grace. It starts out with Ricky, the main character, leading the prayer. "Dear Lord Baby Jesus, or as our brothers in the south call you, Hey Zeus. We thank you so much for this bountiful harvest...." He goes on to thank God for his family and the blessings he has in his life. He continues by saying, "Dear Tiny, Baby Jesus." His wife cuts him off in annoyance saying, "Jesus did grow up; you don't always

have to call him a baby. It's a bit odd praying to a baby." He gets defensive and snaps back, "Look, I like the Christmas Jesus best, and I'm sayin' grace. When you say grace you can say it to Grownup Jesus or Teenage Jesus or Bearded Jesus or whatever Jesus you want." He pauses and then continues. "Infant, Baby Jesus. With your golden, fleece diaper and your tiny, fat balled up fists." The grandfather cuts in saying, "He's a man! He has a beard!" Ricky slams his fists down and says, "Well I like the baby version best!" His friend Cal chimes in saying, "I like to picture Jesus in a tuxedo T-shirt, 'cause that says I want to be formal, but I'm here to party." Ricky's son, Walker adds, "I like to think of Jesus like a ninja, fightin' off evil samurai." Cal nods his head and continues with his version of Jesus. "He has giant eagle wings, and is singing lead vocals for Leonard Skynard, with an angel band. And I'd be in the front row!"

In my opinion, there is no right or wrong way to see God. You can envision God as being Asian, Middle Eastern, black, white, purple or green. It is not how you physically envision God, but how you view Him spiritually. What is sad is that some people don't see Him at all.

I went through a period where I did not believe there was a God. I did not feel any form

of a connection, and thought that God had forgotten about me.

I didn't understand why God couldn't smite the "mean girls", or why I had yet to see a burning bush. I did not understand why I had never met a talking animal or why there were no more mass floods. Why didn't I have a Technicolor dream coat? And why was it that God was never there for me when I needed His help.

I wanted a miracle. I was waiting for God to split the clouds and give me a play-by-play of what I'm supposed to do when life gets hard. I was becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of spiritual guidance I felt in my life. My parents tried to force me to take confirmation, and I said absolutely not. I would much rather be out with my friends, watching movies, or napping than sitting through a class on religion that I viewed as being bogus.

I cannot tell you exactly when it was that I first saw God, because for me it was over a period of time. A massive, news breaking miracle didn't happen. I can't part Chatfield Reservoir, I can't turn 5 fish into 5,000, and I can't survive being swallowed by a whale. What I realized was that God had been with me all along; I had just not realized it.

For so long I was waiting for God to tell me what is right from wrong. I think that God does speak to you, but sometimes He tells you what you don't want to hear. I would like to think that your conscience is God talking to you. You're gut feeling for what is right is God telling you the answer. Sometimes you choose to listen, sometimes you don't. I think that deep down people know right from wrong and it is God helping to guide them. Often time's people don't listen to their "gut" feeling. Sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same.

God has been with me my whole life, and He always will be. I have a million things to be thankful for. I have a wonderful family with two parents that love me; I have a roof over my head and food on the table. I am getting a great education that will help me in the future; I live in a free country. I have a fantastic church and a loving community within.

My miracle isn't something that is going to make headlines, and it isn't something that will be recorded for historical documentation. In a world that is so wrong, we have been given the best miracle of all. When we leave this life, we will be going onto one with our Savior. That is a miracle. Being saved from something unspeakable is a miracle.

It is so easy to think that your life is average and that God has lost your file. I think for many, physical proof is needed to prove something as magnificent as a higher power.

I like to think of God as being like the wind. You can't see Him, but you can feel Him. When you are feeling lost and alone, He will always be there. No ifs, ands, or butts. There are no exceptions to God's love.

Nowadays, God's love is one of the only things that doesn't come with a limited warranty. This is what makes it so beautiful. You are never truly alone because God is always by your side, whether you want Him there or not. Receiving God's love is not like going to the DMV. You do not take a number and wait in line for your turn that may never come. He is always there for you; He does not make you take a number. In return you need to do the same for Him. The Holy Spirit is all around you and waiting for you to accept Him. He will always be there for you.

Many wonder, "If God is real, then why do bad things happen to good people?" No one has a great answer to this, because it often seems that the best of people are the ones faced with the hardest struggles. Perhaps the harder struggles are what make you a better person, and in the end grow you closer to God. There is

a quote that says, “God hands the strongest people the hardest cards. He would never give you more than He knew you could handle.”

Sometimes it is hard to believe, but God has a plan for you. Every single person in this room and across the world has their own unique plan specially designed by God. God’s plan can be compared to a coloring book page. God gives you the outline and tools you need to make your end result beautiful. Whether or not you want to follow God’s plan and draw in the lines is up to you.

Being a disciple of Jesus is not always an easy thing to do. Sometimes you are faced with challenges that do not end up representing your “Christ” side. The bible sometimes tells us to do things that very few of us could actually do. If someone were to slap me, I would not be about to turn the other cheek. When someone makes me mad, it is often that I tell them to stick it in their ear. I cannot say I’m always respectful to my parents (even though I am 99% of the time), and I cannot say that I have never lied. I’d prefer if the Ten Commandments were multiple choice, but unfortunately that is not the way it works.

I try to live through “Christ” as much as I can, but sometimes it can be very hard. These are the times in your life when you scribble

outside the lines of God's plan. The most wonderful thing about God's plan is that he is always willing to let you go back in the lines and try again. No matter how far away you may stray from the plan, God will always be there to help you get back on track.

He loves you. He loves you unconditionally.

I think that a lot of people are waiting for a huge, epic miracle to prove that God exists. Faith would be made a lot easier if God jumped down from Heaven to say hello. However, this would not be faith at all. Faith is defined by Webster's Dictionary as having confidence and trust. Faith is one of the most beautiful things about religion, because it gives you the opportunity to dig deeper and always search for God. Religion wouldn't be religion if there wasn't the aspect of faith. Faith is what truly defines you as being a follower of Christ.

There is a quote that hangs on a plaque in my dad's office that I used to always find to be disappointing. The plaque reads, "Faith makes things possible, not easy." I always thought this was very negative and disregarded it every time I saw it. More recently I have started to think about the quote, and I have found it to not be disheartening, but actually encouraging. Having faith in God does not mean that He is going to

send you all of life's tangible necessities on a cloud. I cannot sit on my couch and watch reruns on MTV all day while expecting God to finish my plan for me.

God will always be there for you, but you have to meet him half way. What God will do is give you the tools to your plan, and it's your job to follow it.

Nothing is impossible with God on your side. Even the word impossible says "I'm possible". The possibilities are endless with God on your side. You need to be confident in God that he has your best interests in mind, and He is following the plan.

Sometimes you are faced with hard obstacles that throw you off course, but God will always help you get back on track.

Trust can often times be the hardest part with faith. When something in your life goes so horribly wrong without explanation, it is often times very hard to try to be optimistic. It is hard to believe that everything happens for a reason at times, because sometimes it seems horrible things happen for no reason at all. The important thing to remember is that God is with you and he is watching over you. Everything God does he does for a reason. So at that moment of sorrow when the pain doesn't make sense, it is

essential to accept that God has a plan. The plan that will in the end make you into the person he wants you to be.

Recently I heard a poem that I fell in love with. It is written by Mary Stevenson:

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 were one set of footprints.

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 have 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 times when you have seen only one set of
footprints in the sand,
Is when I carried you.”

Amen