

FAITH THAT
PLEASES GOD

THE SILENT MOMENT

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The Silent Moment

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

— Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)



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Faith That Pleases God

In the past there were times when, wanting to know if my faith was pleasing to God, I would begin looking at myself, wondering if I had the right amount of faith, or comparing my faith to someone else's, or thinking I was doing either pretty well or not so well in the faith department. But as time has passed, I've come to understand that faith that pleases God is not self-conscious in these ways.

God-honoring faith—rather than being mired in self-evaluation—is God-focused. You might even say it's God-enamored, insatiably interested in knowing who God is and what He is like. This kind of faith lives in wonder and delight at what God reveals of himself through His creation and in His Word. It is a faith that believes God truly exists, and it seeks—as a way of life—to know Him more and more.

Also, faith that pleases God is not about the amount of faith we can muster. Thankfully, it's not up to us to try conjuring “enough” faith but rather to just trust who God is. (In fact, if you think about it, faith in our own faith is a kind of idolatry.) So as we take that pressure off of ourselves, we can look to God and simply know and trust that anything is possible with Him (Genesis 18:14; Luke 1:37).

Yet faith that pleases God understands that God is not obligated to do things our way. While He *can* do anything, He will respond to our prayers from within His perfect wisdom, understanding, knowledge, goodness, timing, and purpose. And a God-pleasing faith steadies itself in what it knows of His faithful character, even when faced with confusion, disappointment, or even tragedy.

Finally, faith that pleases God does what is right and good and true as an outflow of reverence and love for Him. This kind of faith also shows mercy because gratitude for mercy received from God

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overflows in this way. And faith that pleases God walks humbly with Him, trusting Him so completely that whether God grants a petition right away, requires us to wait for His timing, or does something entirely different than what we'd hoped, we understand that God is not absent, cruel, unjust, inattentive, or indifferent, but that in His faithful love, He is working out everything for our good (Micah 6:8; Romans 8:28).

Peace to your heart!

Christine Dallman, Editor

December 1

Love Must Be Shared

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

Scripture: Acts 10:34-48

Song: “How Great Is Your Love”

Sharing with others doesn't come naturally to us. If we doubt this, we need only watch small children. Usually, they're not eager to let other children play with what's theirs. Occasionally, my two children shared voluntarily, but stinginess was the general rule. That's why parents must teach their children to share.

Peter struggled with stinginess too—stinginess with the gospel. He thought God gave the good news only to Jews like himself. To reveal the truth to Peter, God showed him a vision that helped Peter understand that the message of salvation was for *all* people. Then God sent Peter to a Gentile's house to share the gospel.

Ever since sin entered the world, prejudice and selfishness have plagued humanity. But God doesn't view us the way we often view each other. Regardless of where we've come from, God sees each of us as needing His loving redemption. And once we've recognized and received it, He wants us to share it freely, just as Peter did with the people gathered at Cornelius' house.

Father, as I have received Your saving love, help me be ready to share it with others today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reveling in Redemption

The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer” (Ruth 4:14).

Scripture: Ruth 4:13-22

Song: “Jesus Paid It All”

During my childhood, when my mom visited the local Piggly Wiggly grocery store, she received Greenbax stamps. The more groceries she bought, the more stamps they gave her. Also in town was a Greenbax store, where stamps could be redeemed for merchandise. Most of us are familiar with the idea of redeeming things like stamps and coupons for merchandise or discounts. The biblical idea of redemption, however, is the payment of a ransom to purchase back something that’s been lost or forfeited—a rescue.

Ruth’s predicament was dire: her husband had died, and now she lived (with her mother-in-law, Naomi) in a land foreign to her with no sustainable means of provision. However, Boaz was a relative who was eligible to purchase the land that belonged to Naomi’s deceased husband. But if Boaz bought the land, he was obligated to marry Ruth, care for her needs, and have a family with her to carry on her late husband’s name. In a beautiful picture of redemption, Boaz purchased the land and fulfilled his responsibilities to Ruth as a kinsman-redeemer.

Sinful humanity also finds itself in a predicament. But while we were still sinners, God sent Christ to pay our debt, providing redemption for all who will receive it. Once redeemed, our new life begins, and a new Heaven and new earth lie ahead!

Father, thank You for being my Redeemer who saves me from the penalty of sin and provides an eternal inheritance. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Love Hangs On

Ruth replied [to Naomi], “. . . Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Scripture: Ruth 1:6-18, 22

Song: “Unending Love”

My paternal grandparents hung on through the good times and the lean times. Neither ever had a lucrative job, but they made ends meet, raised two children, cared for a nephew, and housed a parent. I recall my grandfather telling of how they once lived on \$10 a week, but with that meager amount, they paid their bills and bought groceries. Just before my grandfather died, he and my grandmother both lay in a nursing home—in the same room and in twin beds pushed together so that they could hold hands.

The part of Ruth’s story in today’s passage is frequently used in marriage ceremonies to emphasize God’s plan for marriages to endure and for the partners to be faithful. Ruth demonstrated her faithfulness by leaving her homeland and following her mother-in-law to a foreign land.

God’s love for us hangs on. Once we are united with Christ by His saving grace, He promises never to leave or forsake us. He will hold our hand through the easy and challenging experiences. No matter how many times we may fail Him, when we return to Him, He will always receive us and offer a fresh start. And He wants us to return that dedication by loving Him with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).

Father, help me to hold onto You tightly, as You hold onto me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God Leads the Way

[God said,] “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9

Song: “All the Way My Savior Leads Me”

When an exchange student arrived at our home, I showed her around: “Here are the light switches. . . . This is how to turn on the shower heater. . . . All your bath towels and soaps are in this closet.” The young lady had traveled abroad before but never alone, and she needed detailed guidance in her new adventure.

After Moses died, God passed the baton of leadership to Joshua. Previously, when Joshua scouted the land of Canaan, Moses had been leading. But this time, Joshua was directly under God’s leadership. So God assured Joshua that He would be with him and bring success as Joshua listened to and obeyed God.

It can be scary when God calls us to step into unfamiliar territory and do something new. But when He calls us, He also assures us that we don’t need to be afraid. As we obey and follow His directions, He will bring about the success He has planned for us.

Father, thank You for giving me faith to follow You and for the clear instructions and assurance Your Word provides. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Raise Your Hand

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matthew 20:30).

Scripture: Matthew 20:25-34

Song: “Cry Out to Jesus”

In elementary school I got good grades and tutored classmates who struggled with their lessons. In secondary school I was promoted to accelerated classes, but I didn't feel smart anymore. I was afraid to raise my hand and embarrass myself, lest I ask a “dumb” question. But inevitably another student would pipe up and ask what I had been thinking, and I would kick myself for not speaking up.

As an adult, I sometimes hesitate to “raise my hand” in prayer. I've been told that God isn't a “genie in a bottle.” *Don't ask a dumb question!* I second-guess my petitions in case my motives aren't pure. *Don't ask a dumb question!* But when Jesus passed by the blind men, they dared to speak up—even shout—and ask Him for what they wanted. I wonder how many people in the crowd, upon witnessing the verbal exchange and healing, wished they had been bold and spoken up too.

The men couldn't see Jesus with their eyes, but they saw Him with their hearts. He was the long-awaited Messiah, the one who had the power to give them what they needed. God knows what we need, and He welcomes our every request. He invites us to ask Him and then trust that He will answer according to His will.

Father, help me remember that You want me to boldly ask You for whatever I need. In Jesus' name, amen.

Yes, and Amen

[Jesus said,] “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:22).

Scripture: Matthew 21:18-22

Song: “Breakthrough”

Darin’s parents and some Bible school students went to visit a man who was near death at a hospital in the African country of Burundi. The doctor asked the group not to visit because the man was too weak. Right away, the students began praying for the man’s healing. One said, “If anyone doesn’t believe God can heal this man, they should leave the room now.” Darin’s dad began praying the prayer of the father in Mark 9:24—“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”—and the dying man was healed completely.

Years later, Darin prayed for his dad’s complete healing from cancer, but instead of being healed, his father passed away a few weeks later. Darin testifies, “I know God can heal, but I also know sometimes He chooses not to do so.”

In my own life, I experienced something similar when my brother was in a motorcycle accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. I believed for a miraculous healing, but my brother died 18 days later. Maybe you’re praying for healing or for a different kind of “mountain to move” in your life. Perhaps you’re imagining what God’s best answer would look like to you; but Scripture reminds us that while we only need to have faith as small as a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20), God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). We must pray, believe, and then trust in His wisdom.

Father, thank You that You’re worthy of my trust and You answer each prayer. In Jesus’ name, amen.

By Our Side

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1).

Scripture: Psalm 27

Song: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Although I attended public high school, our varsity choir closed every concert by singing Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” But even for me, a regular churchgoer, the message of the powerful song went in one ear and out the other. I sang the words by rote, mechanically, without thinking of their meaning. I might as well have been singing a nursery rhyme.

Later in my young-adult life, when I was struggling with trials and feeling overwhelmed, the lyrics of the oft-sung hymn would pop into my head, and the second verse especially comforted me: “Did we in our own strength confide, / Our striving would be losing; / Were not the right Man on our side, / The Man of God’s own choosing: / Dost ask who that may be? / Christ Jesus, it is He; / Lord Sabaoth, His Name, / From age to age the same, / And He must win the battle.”

King David faced intense battles and poured out his problems in the Psalms, but he also acknowledged that he was not alone. God was with him and fighting for him. In the same way, when we feel overloaded, we can read the Bible, meditate on its truth, and be assured of God’s presence, protection, and power—no matter what we are facing.

Father, thank You for being a mighty fortress and my helper. I praise You that no one on earth is Your equal. In Jesus’ name, amen.

In Line With Scripture

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:13).

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3-14

Song: “How Firm a Foundation”

I once hired a professional to hang wallpaper in my kitchen. As I watched the woman work, I learned about the plumb line, a cord covered with chalk with a weight at the end. When the cord was snapped against the wall, the chalk left a vertical line that served as a guideline to hang the next strip of paper. Without a plumb line, the designer would have to eyeball it and decide what looked straight. The first strip of paper she laid might be close, but it wouldn't be perfect. After hanging a few strips, the paper would end up crooked, and the project would be a mess.

A similar thing can happen in our own lives if we read the truth in God's Word, then rely on our own understanding. We might begin with right perspective, but we hear a sermon or read an article based on a person's opinion, and one decision at a time, we veer off-course and find ourselves unaligned with God's precepts.

Just as a designer uses a plumb line to keep on track, we must consistently measure what we hear against God's plumb line—His Word. Otherwise, we can move far away from God and what is right, not realizing where we went wrong.

Father, thank You for giving me Your Word as a “plumb line” by which I can always measure my thoughts and actions. In Jesus' name, amen.

Underlying Issues

Eliab, David's oldest brother, . . . burned with anger at [David] and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?" (1 Samuel 17:28).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:1, 3-4, 8, 20-30

Song: "Voice of Truth"

When the Pacific Northwest clouds don't obscure the view and "the mountain is out," I stand in awe of the magnificent, snow-capped Mount Rainier. But as a resident of the surrounding community, I also know that Mount Rainier is a seething, active volcano. Beneath the breathtaking surface lies a smoldering magma chamber that one day may blow, burying the region in lava and ash.

Jesse told David to deliver supplies and check on his brothers, and when David arrived at the battlefield, he dutifully carried out his father's business. But when he heard Goliath's taunts, his attention turned toward his Heavenly Father's business. Everyone wanted the Philistines to be defeated, but no one except the young shepherd stepped forward. At David's interest in the situation, Eliab erupted in anger, his sarcastic reaction revealing a smoldering resentment toward his younger sibling.

Jesus told the Pharisees that "the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Matthew 12:34). Sometimes people we know and love blow up and spew hurtful words based on emotions that have been seething beneath the surface. As followers of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, we can check our initial reaction and ask God to help us respond with grace and truth.

Father, help me take a step back when I'm the recipient of hurtful words and respond with Your patient wisdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

Start With *Why*

[David said,] “I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:31-37, 45, 48-50

Song: “My Tribute”

In his *TED Talk* “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” Simon Sinek draws a target of three concentric circles. In the outer circle he writes the word *What*; in the second circle, *How*, and inside the bull’s-eye, *Why*. Most people striving for success start with *what* they should do, Sinek says. Next, they decide *how* they should do it. However, there’s not much thought given to *why*. He clarifies that making money is a result, not a reason, and often, the attempt to succeed fails because the approach is backward. Sinek asserts that successful people and businesses first start with *why*, a core belief or conviction.

The shepherd boy David was not yet a king, but he had been anointed by God. When he heard Goliath’s threat against God and His people, David knew *what* to do: combat this enemy. David knew *how* to do it: with his slingshot. But ultimately David’s motivation was found within *why* he needed to do it: to defend God’s great name.

As followers of Jesus who are serving in His kingdom, we know *what* to do: make disciples of Jesus. With God’s direction, we learn *how* to do it, using the skills and gifts with which we’ve been equipped. But *why* we do it will be the lasting motivation: we do all things for the glory of God.

Father, living to glorify You is my greatest motivation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Busted!

As [Tamar] was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. . . . “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are” (Genesis 38:25).

Scripture: Genesis 38:6-11, 13-18, 24-26

Song: “Great Are You Lord”

Scenic back roads beckon me home each day after work. It’s a relaxing drive following a long day. Spotting deer or a flock of turkeys is common, but it can also be easy to speed. Recently, I popped over a hill, and a police car sat beside the road with a radar gun pointed my way. I hit my brakes too late. He pulled out behind me and threw on his lights. Busted! Slowly, I pulled over and awaited punishment. Thankfully, the officer met me with sweet mercy and gave me a warning instead of a ticket.

When we’re not keeping in step with God’s Spirit, we end up on the wrong side of God’s law of love. Our flesh is rebellious, selfish, desiring its own way instead of the good things God has planned for us. When we confess our sin, however, God meets us with mercy, just as He did when we first came to Him for salvation.

In God’s great plan, Jesus took our sin on himself so that we could be free to live in fellowship with Him and learn to walk in His ways. In Him, we go from busted to beloved.

Father, thank You for extending Your sweet mercy. I’ll honor You by extending mercy to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Little Signs

[Rahab said,] “Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death” (Joshua 2:12-13).

Scripture: Joshua 2:1-6, 8-16

Song: “Himself”

When a new job came my way with a company that managed homeowner associations, it was a refreshing change. But I knew nothing about the business. Once I started to learn my new job, I began noticing little signs staked in the ground outside of many subdivisions, each one indicating who managed the property. Due to all I’d learned, I now knew what they meant, and I saw them everywhere.

Rahab was outside Israel’s community, and so she understandably sought a sure sign to guarantee the safety of her family. In our own lives as believers, we may be tempted to seek a sign from God for assurance or to help us find His direction.

However, as God’s people, instead of looking for a sign from God, we can seek God Himself. In our genuine search to draw near to Him, we’ll come to know Him increasingly and find Him faithful. Then we’ll see the many signs of His protection and provision in our lives that, perhaps, we’d been overlooking because we didn’t really know Him well enough. Through studying His Word, praying full-heartedly, and surrendering our will to His, we’ll see signs of His goodness everywhere. When we’re seeking Him in these ways, He won’t fail to reveal His love to us.

Father, I don’t need signs because I know I can trust You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Trust Test

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy (James 5:11).

Scripture: James 5:1-11

Song: "Walk by Faith"

Money was tight when my kids were young. Once, I put \$10 worth of gas in my car and handed a check to the cashier. She handed me back \$90 in cash. I held the money, confused for a moment, and then realized the problem. "My check was for \$10," I said as I handed back the cash. She put the money in her cash drawer, and I headed to my car with a heavy heart. I *needed* \$90. Doing the right thing doesn't always feel good.

Job persevered during God's thorough examination of his faith. At the end of that testing, God brought tremendous blessing. God will also test us. When He does, it may be that He's building our faith or teaching us an important lesson. Sometimes the testing may be brief, or it may take years.

God gives the most important and vital tests. He knows us inside and out. He knows our thoughts, intentions, and attitudes (Psalm 139:1-4). He finishes the work He has begun in us to make us more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). We can expect a trust test or two along the way, but we can also know that God keeps His promises and is forever faithful.

Father, help me persevere during times of trial, knowing You are establishing my trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Forgotten Spanking

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Song: “Grace Greater Than Our Sin”

One Sunday when I was a kid, I was behaving badly in church. After multiple warnings from my dad to “straighten up,” he resorted to promising me a spanking when we got home. His words finally forced me to behave. The time seemed to creep slowly by as we drove home from church, and my angst grew with each passing mile. When we got home, I went straight to my room and stayed there, and before I knew it, bedtime came. I slipped peacefully to sleep, thankful for my dad’s forgetfulness.

Paul knew how badly he’d behaved before his life-changing encounter with Jesus. He was grateful for God’s mercy toward him. Our Heavenly Father has been merciful toward us as well, giving us what we don’t deserve (mercy) and withholding from us what we do (punishment). He lavishes kindness on us by giving us an abundant life through His Son, including eternal life with Him in Heaven.

My dad probably didn’t forget my bad behavior and his promise to spank me. He just chose to extend grace and mercy. God deals with us as His children in a similar way. He is gracious toward us and full of mercy. There is no greater parent, and He loves us more than we can imagine.

Father, thank You for Your incredible mercy and forgiveness. I will live gratefully today in Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Greater Good

David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground (2 Samuel 12:16).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26–12:1-8, 15-18, 24

Song: “Even If”

My co-worker Christi broke the fibula in her lower left leg while playing miniature golf. She had surgery to repair the bone, and the surgeon put a metal plate in her leg. Part of her recovery included physical therapy twice a week. We were discussing her therapy one day, and she said, “It’s painful to endure, but it will be worth it to heal properly. It’s for the greater good.” Her words were about her body, but they resonated with spiritual truth.

David did everything within his power to save his child, but it didn’t change the outcome. Accepting God’s will for our lives can be tough, and keeping our hearts from hardening can be a challenge. We can’t see the greater good when our vision is blurred with tears. But God sees the big picture and is working everything for our good—even the hardest things to understand.

We need to heal properly after a trauma in life. Even in healing, though, there will be pain. We may grieve deeply, but grief is part of healing. Placing our trust in God’s sovereign plan, as David did, is an important part of healing properly. In life, we might do everything within our power to help our situation, but ultimately, we need to trust God’s wisdom.

Father, even in my pain, help me trust Your wisdom and goodness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Why Don't You Trust Me?

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:10).

Scripture: Psalm 9:1-14

Song: “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

Why don't you trust Me with your children? It seemed God was speaking clearly to my spirit, and it stunned me as I wrestled with the idea of putting my 3-year-old in childcare. I didn't realize that by worrying about my youngest son's care, I wasn't trusting God. I didn't want him in childcare, but I knew I needed to work. Immediately, I placed my trust in God and began a local job search. I left childcare in God's powerful hands. Amazingly, I ended up with a job at a church with *free* onsite childcare.

Incredible things happen when we trust the one who loves us most. Trusting Him through one life experience after another underscores the truth of His Word: He is trustworthy. If things go well, we can praise Him. If things go sideways, we can look to Him prayerfully to lead us through the difficult times. Eventually, the outcome of our trust in Him will manifest as unshakable faith. In fact, our trials build trust in a way nothing else can.

Trusting God in those hard places where we must let go of our desires leads us into a relationship with Him that is deeper than we could have otherwise known. He already knows our thoughts, fears, and intentions. He works for our good and always has our best interests at heart in any and every situation.

Father, show me areas in my life where I need to trust You more. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make Jesus Known!

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife (Matthew 1:5-6).

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

Song: "Only Jesus"

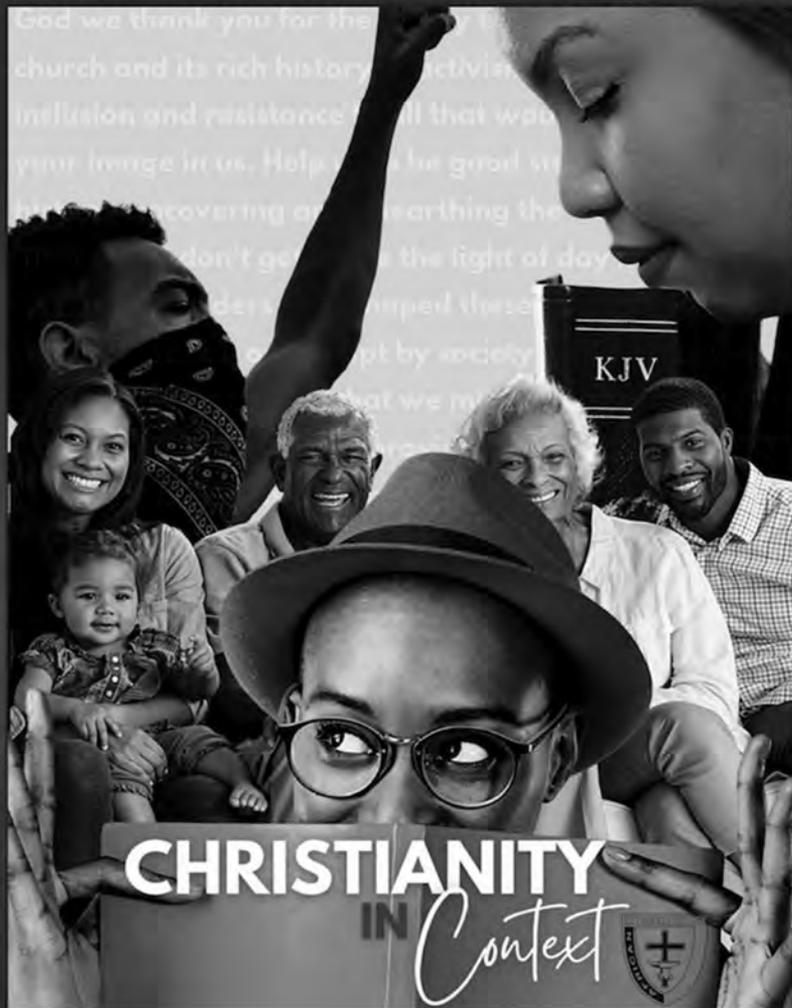
During rush hour at a Washington, D.C., subway, a well-known violinist played anonymously, not for attention but as an experiment. In 43 minutes, Joshua Bell played six classical masterpieces on one of the most expensive instruments in the world. A total of 1,097 people passed by as he played. Few stopped to listen. They didn't know that the person playing in the subway had sold out a symphony hall only three days earlier. In fact, only one person recognized him.

In today's passage, Bathsheba is mentioned only as Uriah's wife, even though she was the mother of Solomon, one of history's most famous kings. It's a reminder that while we may wish to be seen and acknowledged for who we are and what we have accomplished, at times we might not be. Of course, that can be frustrating because, by nature, we want to be known and to make our mark on the world.

But truth be told, the real name worth knowing and making known is *Jesus*. People all around us need to know of Him and His gift of salvation. God offers the "music" of His beautiful gospel, and He sends it to places we might never expect to go. Let's follow Him there!

Father, grant me courage to speak the gospel boldly and to make Your Son's name known. In Jesus' name, amen.

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