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THE SILENT MOMENT

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The Silent Moment

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume

— John 12:3



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Costly Sacrifice

Some people have a knack for giving the most apt and meaningful gifts. Their ears perk up anytime someone talks about a favorite color, flavor, flower, restaurant, hobby, or activity. They silently take mental notes and keep such details stored up for future use. Then, these “super-gifters” show up to a special occasion with a present that makes the receiver feel seen and loved. It may or may not be something expensive, but there has been an obvious investment in getting to know the recipient’s wants and needs. The message cannot be missed: “You are important to me. I’ve been paying attention, and I know what speaks to your heart.”

Sacrifices are a special kind of gift. Although most often given with a sense of gladness and deep gratitude, there are times when sacrificial giving might be more somber—as when Abraham was willing to give up his son, Isaac. All sacrifices have this in common, though: they display a heart of surrender and devotion to the recipient.

Costly sacrifice may involve a big price tag, as was attached to the expensive perfume Mary poured on Jesus’ feet. (Or maybe something like a budget-stretching engagement ring comes to mind.) Regardless of the financial cost, the essence of such a gift is the longing to give something that would bless the recipient and communicate the giver’s devotion. At times, the sum of all the giver owns may not feel like enough to offer.

Considering these things, I wonder, *When was the last time I made a costly sacrifice out of my gratitude and devotion to the Lord?* I tend to give sacrifices that cost me—but not too much. My sacrifices may communicate a measure of devotion to God, but I’m not so sure about costly sacrifice. What precious thing have I given in joyful abandon to Christ recently? Or when was the last time I

brought something to which I've been clinging and left it at Jesus' feet? As I reflect on this, there's a sense of excitement. What *might* I bring?

Costly sacrifice is not difficult when it springs from devoted love. If we haven't given a costly sacrifice lately, it could mean we need to start being more attentive, start taking mental notes, start remembering what brings the Lord honor and blessing and why we call Him our Savior. It means lifting our eyes to see Him more carefully through the lens of His Word, really looking at Him, and renewing our sense of gratitude for His display of marvelous love.

Jesus is the ultimate “super-gifter.” We could never give Him more than He's given us, but we can honor Him by bringing sacrifices that demonstrate the depth of our devotion to Him.

Peace to your heart!

Christine Dallman, Editor

March 1

Simple, Not Always Easy

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

Scripture: Micah 6:1–8

Song: “He Has Shown Thee, O Man”

My daughter excitedly waved the paper that had arrived in the mail. Her ACT results showed that she qualified for a substantial college scholarship. She had worked hard at school, studying and taking practice tests, and it paid off!

Of course, our salvation cannot be earned or achieved through any effort of our own. However, as God’s people we are to diligently walk in His ways. As good students of God’s Word, we need attentive, focused hearts and minds that seek to “find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10). The prophet Micah boiled the list down to three things: acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

While this *sounds* simple, it can be challenging. For example, what if doing the right thing costs me more than I’m willing to give? Or what happens when the instruction in God’s Word runs contrary to my desires? While doing what pleases God can be difficult for us at times, He will give us all the grace and strength we need to succeed (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

Father, help me to act justly and mercifully even when it’s not easy. Help me show Your love through gracious actions, especially to those in need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Taking God's Holiness Seriously

[God told Moses to say to the Israelites,] “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5).

Scripture: Exodus 19:1–14

Song: “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!”

Fresh out of college, I really wanted a particular job. It paid well, offered good benefits, and had potential in the corporate world. I had limited experience, but I carefully crafted my résumé, dressed appropriately, and was hired. Once I started working, I realized the visibility of the position meant that I needed to maintain the standards of dress and etiquette that helped me get the job in the first place.

In today's passage, Israel was reminded that God had selected them as His special people, something not to be taken lightly. To prepare for the manifestation of God's presence, the people needed to wash themselves and observe the boundaries God designated. Then God would deliver His instruction about how to live as a people set apart for Him.

Because Jesus provided His own righteousness on our behalf, we can now draw near to God without the need for ceremonial cleansing. However, God's holiness hasn't changed. Romans 12:1 reminds us that we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. This means that our choices matter: the words we speak, what we watch and listen to, and how we go about our relationships. As we follow the leading of God's indwelling Spirit, He will guide our decisions and teach us God's holy ways.

Father, I embrace Your call to be set apart as I live to serve You and make You known today. In Jesus' name, amen.

False Gods

[God told Ezekiel,] “Say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!’” (Ezekiel 14:6).

Scripture: Ezekiel 14:1–11

Song: “O for a Closer Walk with God”

I am blessed that my work has enabled me to travel internationally. Experiencing the richness of human culture provides a beautiful glimpse into what the gathering of all nations will be like. However, one of the heartbreaking aspects of spending time abroad is witnessing large numbers of people worshipping other gods. In a few instances, I have watched people prostrate themselves before physical idols, looking to them for help.

Today’s passage hits upon a familiar theme in Scripture: God consistently calls upon His people to turn away from idolatry. Time and again, rather than turning to the living God, the people looked to images made by human hands to provide help, or to meet some need. God calls this practice detestable.

Western culture offers a plethora of enticements that can lead our hearts away from God. We should examine ourselves to see whether there is anything we are looking to as our source of help or to fulfill our needs instead of the Lord. As we identify these metaphorical idols, we can then seek help from the Lord and accountability from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Father, please fill me with courage to shun everything in society that draws me away from You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Welcoming God's Tests

Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness (Psalm 26:2–3).

Scripture: Psalm 26

Song: “Lord, You Have Searched Me”

Test anxiety is a common experience for students. I have seen this phenomenon in third graders, high schoolers, and university seniors alike. Exams are a means of accountability: they reveal what we know (or don't know) about a subject. At times, even the best-prepared students are sweating it when they face a standardized test that will determine whether they can get into the academic program they're aspiring to.

David's words in today's psalm reveal no sign of test anxiety. In fact, David *asks* the Lord to examine him. The statement following his request is not an arrogant one; his confidence is not in the merit of his own righteousness. Instead, he can calmly ask the Lord to test and try him because he knows that he can rely on God's unfailing love and faithfulness in all things.

This psalm reinforces Scripture's consistent message about God's grace and faithfulness. Like David, we have shortcomings in our own lives. However, that is not how God evaluates us. His standard is whether we humbly trust His faithfulness and unfailing love.

Father, even as You search and test my heart today, thank You for the peace You give me in Christ. I trust that You are teaching me to walk in the kind of faith and humility that please You. In Jesus' name, amen.

March 5

Hydro Power

The man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory (Ezekiel 43:1–2).

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:1–12

Song: “God of Grace and God of Glory”

The majesty of a colossal waterfall is one of God’s great creative gifts to us. The roar of thousands of cubic feet of water cascading from hundreds of feet above is an awesome display of power. Almost nothing can beat the experience of standing in the presence of something so potent while a rainbow glimmers through the mist. Rarely does one get to observe such an intricate mix of beauty and strength.

Ezekiel had an experience even more remarkable than viewing a sublime waterfall when he beheld the glory of God. Standing at the temple’s east-facing gate in his vision, he heard a voice like rushing waters and saw the land become radiant. God gave Ezekiel this glimpse of His glory before giving him a message for the people. God’s instruction for the people to be holy was intricately connected to His own holy nature.

God wants our behavior to align with His teaching (Deuteronomy 10:12–13). However, our actions should always be rooted in our deep understanding of His nature. Contemplation of God’s holiness is foundational for our personal pursuit of a righteous life.

Father, thank You for revealing Your glory to me. May I grow in holiness as I contemplate Your beauty, majesty, and all Your wonderful works. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Suit Up!

[God said,] “When [the Levitical priests] enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen clothes. . . . They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists” (Ezekiel 44:17–18).

Scripture: Ezekiel 44:15–27

Song: “The Lord Our Righteousness”

Getting dressed for a football game is an event in itself. Get both ankles taped. Put on pants with thigh pads and knee pads. Lace up cleats. Buckle shoulder pads. Put on helmet, snap chin guard in place, and insert mouthpiece. As cumbersome as wearing all this equipment is, football players will tell you that each piece is important for participating in the game.

The clothing worn by Israel’s priests was an important part of their ministry before God. Each article—from linen tunic, to undergarment, to belt, to turban—had a specific function and purpose. The priests always had to be mindful of the clothes they wore when ministering before the Lord and also when ministering among the people.

As Christians, God does not require us to wear special garments in our daily lives as He commanded the priests of Israel to do. However, the Bible does tell us to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14). Whether we are in church or out, we can be as careful to dress ourselves in this manner as the priests who served in God’s temple were careful to dress in their holy attire.

Father, thank You for clothing me in Your Son’s righteousness. May everyone around me see Jesus through my words and actions. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 7

In Hindsight

After [Jesus] was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).

Scripture: John 2:12–22

Song: “Christ Arose”

The Christian school I served at in Thailand would regularly take time to remember God’s faithfulness to the ministry. One story we often retold was about a time when the highway department tore down the buildings on our new campus so they could build a road for the city. It was through this challenging event that God showed himself strong and mighty on our behalf as He provided the means for us to build larger facilities, which ultimately allowed us to enroll more students.

As the story in today’s Scripture passage moves to its conclusion, Jesus makes an impossible-sounding statement: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19). The fact that Jesus was referring to His body and not a building would become clear to the disciples only after His resurrection.

Life with God requires us to grow comfortable with not knowing how everything will work out based on what we can see at the moment. It is often the case that we only understand what God was doing in a situation after the fact. Taking time to remember what God has done in the past can help us remain steadfast in our faith when we face trials in the present.

Father, I believe You raised Jesus from the dead. I know I can trust You in all things because nothing is impossible for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Source of Life

The woman said to [Jesus], “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:15).

Scripture: John 4:13–26

Song: “Fill My Cup, Lord”

We drink it, we wash with it, we clean with it. Water is a core element of our daily lives. Our own bodies are more than 50 percent water, and our planet cannot survive without it. During an average year a single city like Atlanta, Georgia, receives more than a hundred billion gallons of precipitation, an almost unbelievable amount, which allows life to thrive.

As Jesus often did, He used something familiar to our human experience to illustrate a vital spiritual truth. The woman at the well knew that access to a reliable water source was necessary for survival. What she had yet to grasp was that putting her faith in Jesus was even more fundamental to her well-being than access to all the clean drinking water in the world. What Jesus offers is a chance to experience spiritual transformation and a relationship with God the Father in a way she had never known before.

The woman in today’s passage had significant personal issues that may have brought her shame and scorn. Jesus did not shun her because of these things. Instead, He approached her directly with a word of hope. He comes to us with that same message, no matter what we may be experiencing.

Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, who quenches my spiritual thirst and gives me eternal life by His abundant grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Rebuilt with Love

The LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give” (Exodus 25:1–2).

Scripture: Exodus 25:1–9; 26:1, 31–37

Song: “Make Me a Servant”

I was a minister in southern Louisiana when Hurricane Katrina destroyed our coastal cities. The loss of life and property was devastating to our communities. After the waters receded, thousands upon thousands of Christians from around the nation descended upon our state to help us rebuild our neighborhoods. Volunteers demucked houses and hauled off refuse too gross to describe. The sacrificial service of these believers was a testimony to the God of hope.

God directed Moses to build a tabernacle. This structure would be where God’s glory would dwell and where His priests would minister before Him. Building a tabernacle was no small undertaking. Yet, the people responded with generous hearts as they donated the textiles, animal skins, and precious metals needed for completing the project.

Sacrificial service done with a happy and generous spirit is a significant way to share God’s love with the world. Many people have come to the Lord after receiving assistance from God’s people. Our service is effective in touching other people’s hearts because we are motivated by Christ’s love and a desire for God to get all the glory.

Father, nothing I do will ever compare to how You served me by sending Jesus to the cross on my behalf. As I serve You joyfully, I pray You would bless those around me and bring glory to Your name. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Suffering Forges Faithfulness

Son though he was, [Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Scripture: Hebrews 5

Song: “Blessed Be Your Name”

Although no stranger to suffering, Helen Keller did not begrudge her infirmities. They didn't hold her back but gave her strength and perseverance. She went on to become the first deaf and blind person to earn a college degree. A quote attributed to her provides a glimpse into her perspective: “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

When Jesus suffered on our behalf, He didn't begrudge the painful trial. His response to suffering proved His love for His Father, demonstrating that He was a faithful Son. He willingly went to the cross to fulfill His Father's plan of salvation.

When we find ourselves in the midst of suffering—no matter how long- or short-lived—it's important to remember that God has not abandoned us, that He never stops loving us. Our suffering is not random and meaningless, and our trust in the Lord is not in vain. God is with us in our trials, and He is able to form in us a tender heart of compassion and an obedient trust to endure.

Father, thank You for reminding me that You are with me in my suffering and that, in love, You are forging a faithful heart in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Set Apart to Serve God

Moses said to the assembly, “This is what the LORD has commanded to be done.” Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him (Leviticus 8:5–7).

Scripture: Leviticus 8:1–13

Song: “Draw Me Nearer”

As a child, I was baptized in Africa, where my parents worked as missionaries. As an adult, I look back on that experience as a privilege, being baptized by and with Nigerian believers. I love that part of my personal story. However, as special as my baptism experience is to me, it is the fact of my belonging to Christ and being set apart to Him that is truly significant.

Today’s passage is about a time when Moses washed and clothed Aaron and his sons as a symbol of their being set apart to serve God in His tabernacle and to minister on behalf of the people. What an honor!

Today, when any of us receives God’s gift of salvation by grace through faith, we are also set apart by God for His purposes. Our washing is spiritual—a cleansing from our sin. As a result, God’s grace is at work in our lives, and we are equipped for meaningful service in His kingdom. What an honor it is to belong to Him!

Father, thank You for cleansing me from my sin, clothing me in Christ’s righteousness, and setting me apart to serve You. May I be mindful—today and always—that I am Yours. In Jesus’ name, amen.

His Blood Given for Us

[Moses] then presented the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head (Leviticus 8:14).

Scripture: Leviticus 8:14–23

Song: “The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power”

Some years ago, at a missionary reunion, I heard about a young Nigerian boy who had been asked to donate blood to his sister who was ill. This child walked about a mile to get to the hospital to donate his blood. After the procedure, he lay on the bed for a long time. Finally, someone asked him if he was OK, to which he responded, “When will I die?” Come to find out, he had arrived with the impression that the procedure would take all his blood for his sister’s sake.

Today’s Scripture mentions some of the many sacrifices we read about in the Old Testament. These were required by God and accepted by Him as atonement. But in the New Testament, we read of the perfect and permanent, one-time sacrifice that did away with the need for all other sacrifices. That perfect sacrifice, of course, is Jesus, whose atoning death, burial, and resurrection has provided the gift of salvation for all who will receive it.

The Nigerian boy had the ability to help his sister heal through his gift of donated blood. It did not require his life, but he was willing to give it. Jesus’ sacrifice *did* require His life. And Jesus’ sacrifice offers eternal life for God’s adopted children (Gal. 4:6–7)!

Father, thank You for sending Your Son to save me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Taste of Heaven

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! . . . It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion (Psalm 133:1, 3).

Scripture: Psalm 133

Song: "All Creatures of Our God and King"

When my family gets together, we seem to have nearly every possible color of eyes, hair, and skin tone among us. Though my husband and I are white, three of our five grandchildren have African-American, Asian, and Hispanic ancestry. Two of our grandchildren have blond hair and blue eyes, and if you throw in my daughter's red hair—and the touches of gray from my husband and me—we have a lot of different appearances included in our family!

Today's Scripture expresses just how beautiful it is when believers—regardless of distinctions such as race, nationality, language, or socioeconomic status—live in the peace of unity. An inspiring picture of this can be seen in Revelation 7:9, where John looks around in his vision and sees a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before God's throne and worshipping Him together.

On this side of eternity, we sometimes have trouble getting along with one another. It's something we work on all our lives. How pleasant it is when we *do* get along. It's a little taste of Heaven.

Father, I need Your wisdom and humility to pursue the kind of unity that comes through grace and truth. As others witness the blessing of peaceful fellowship among Your people, may they be drawn to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Better Priest

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood . . . why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:11).

Scripture: Hebrews 7:1–14

Song: “Before the Throne of God Above”

I’ve heard it said that the book of Hebrews is the “better-than” book. It tells of many things that are better than others. For instance, it speaks of a better covenant enacted on better promises (8:6); a greater, more perfect tabernacle (9:11); better and lasting possessions (10:34); and a better kingdom—one that cannot be shaken (12:28).

Today’s passage tells of a better priest. Many of the early Christians to whom the book was written were Jews. For some, an obstacle to their understanding of Jesus as their high priest was that Jesus was not from the traditional Levitical priestly line. So, the writer of Hebrews reminds them of Melchizedek—mentioned in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110—who was a priest to God before the Levitical line was established. The writer goes on to make the point that Jesus was like Melchizedek in that sense, but even better.

The point is that we have a great high priest—better than any from the Levitical line—one who forever intercedes for us before God’s throne. How blessed we are to have such an intercessor and Savior!

Father, thank You for giving Your Son, whose name is above every other name. I look forward to the day when I will stand before You, made perfect by all He has provided as my high priest. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Perfect Priest

The law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28).

Scripture: Hebrews 7:15–28

Song: “Blessed Assurance”

In ancient Rome, when generals returned from major military victories, a triumphal procession would ensue, beginning early in the morning and lasting a full day, or even two days. In his horse-drawn, gold- and ivory-adorned chariot, the general would parade through the streets of Rome with his troops, prisoners, and spoil amid the cheers and praise of the people, who would esteem the general, sometimes as a god. As part of this march through the city, a slave might be assigned to follow behind the general, the whole time whispering to him, “Remember you are mortal.”

Our Scripture today tells us about Jesus, our great high priest who, though He was fully man, was so much more: He was, in fact, also fully God. This passage in Hebrews draws a contrast between the Levitical priests and Jesus. Those earlier servants of God from the priestly line were mere men—humans full of flaws and failings. But Jesus is not a priest from Aaron’s line; His priesthood is based in His eternal existence with God.

Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant, a priest who is holy, blameless, and pure—a perfect priest. His intercession is permanent, and He can save us completely!

Father, Your Son is the perfect high priest, whose intercession has saved me. Thank You for being a perfect God with a perfect, unshakable plan. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Life's Impact

[God told Moses,] “Make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy” (Exodus 29:37).

Scripture: Exodus 29:1–9, 35–37

Song: “I Would Be True”

In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Baily sees what things would have been like if he had never been born. Through this revelation, he is surprised and humbled to realize the important difference his actions, kindnesses, and sacrifices have made in the experience of so many others. He had been a consistent source of encouragement, support, and even rescue to those in his sphere of influence.

In the Old Testament days, only priests could approach God's holy presence in the temple, but on this side of Christ's atoning sacrifice, all believers can approach His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). Christ has bridged the gap between holy God and sinful humanity by taking our sins on himself at the cross and providing His own righteousness to us.

In today's key verse we see that those who touched the altar of God became holy. Like that image, we have been made holy through the altar of Christ's sacrifice. How are we carrying the weighty responsibility of being God's holy people? Are others better off for having been around us? Are we showing the world Jesus' truth and love by how we live, what we say, and what we do?

Father, it's my desire to follow You faithfully, reflecting Your goodness to those around me. Use my life to demonstrate Your grace and truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Living Stones

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:2–3).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1–5

Song: “Goodness of God”

When my children were younger, they had little plastic building blocks all over the house. The process of building something new took time and was always an imaginative effort. I can easily recall the pride and joy on their faces whenever they asked me to look at one of their new creations.

As God’s children, we are being built into a beautiful spiritual house, pleasing and precious to God. Part of our cooperation in that work is to be intentional about rooting out sin in our lives. We might read the strong admonition in today’s passage and anxiously wonder, *How do I get rid of sin?* Verse 3 holds the key: it becomes immeasurably easier to choose God’s ways once we have known His goodness.

When God instructs us to do something, He always provides the strength and grace to do it. If you’re feeling discouraged, lean into God’s goodness. Receive it; let *it* fuel your life—not self-imposed expectations or anxious efforts. You are God’s workmanship, a creation in which He takes great joy (Ephesians 2:10). Look to Him for what you need today.

Father, I praise You for Your goodness. As I look to You, may sin be rooted out and Your ways be established in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Sacrifice of Praise

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2).

Scripture: Psalm 141

Song: “Lift Up Holy Hands”

As I sat in church that day, I once again asked God to heal me. I was in so much pain and had been for quite a while. That morning, a woman shared her testimony of how she had been healed. *Father*, I prayed, *please take my pain away*. Nothing happened. As our worship leader called us to stand and praise God, I fought back tears of disappointment.

At the beginning of Psalm 141, David cries out for God to hear his prayer. He is asking the Lord that his prayer remain before Him like incense. And David requests that his act of worship—the lifting of his hands to God—be like the evening sacrifice offered in the temple.

There are times when coming before our Heavenly Father is a sacrifice of worship. We have all likely experienced times when we’ve desperately sought God in prayer. Maybe it’s been a prayer for healing, salvation for a loved one, peace in our home, or financial provision, and all we seem to get back from God is silence. In verse 8 David says, “But my eyes are fixed on you.” Throughout the Psalms, we see in David a heart that says, *Lord, no matter what happens or what my enemies do to me, I will praise You*.

Father, I will seek to follow David’s example and praise You, even when it feels like a sacrifice.

You Smell so Good!

We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:12–17

Song: “May the Fragrance”

Have you ever walked by someone and caught a whiff of how good they smell or passed a bakery and been drawn inside by the tantalizing aromas? While I was growing up, my dad smoked a pipe, and every night after dinner, he would blow smoke rings to my siblings’ and my delight. Forty years later, the smell of pipe tobacco still gives me a feeling of nostalgia. Smells can evoke powerful feelings in us.

Verse 14 of today’s passage tells us that God always “leads us . . . to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.” To some, this is a comforting spiritual aroma that brings peace; for others it’s a scent that repels. Either way, by the very nature of Christ in us, we will have an impact on those around us.

Not everyone will enjoy the smell of someone else’s perfume or certain foods or pipe tobacco. But it is not the fault of those things that they smell as they do. It is what they are. The same is true for us: we belong to Christ and are being used by the Holy Spirit to bring His aroma wherever we go and to everyone we meet. It is who we are.

Father, I want people around me be drawn to You by the aroma of Your grace and truth at work in my life. Thank You for the privilege of being Yours. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Hope of Restoration

On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:16-17).

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14–20

Song: “He Has Made Me Glad”

When we know we’ve done something we shouldn’t, the prospect of consequences may hang over us like a dark, foreboding cloud. We may suffer sleeplessness, anxiety, loss of appetite. We may be unable to enjoy interactions with others and lose interest in our favorite pastimes. It’s miserable to be awaiting punishment. But, oh, the relief when we’re met with mercy instead!

Today’s passage is a beautiful picture of God’s promise of mercy and hope for His people. While the Israelites had rebelled against God and deserved God’s judgment, Zephaniah does not speak of complete destruction or annihilation but of God’s plan to refine and restore His people, providing peace and protection, rescue and righteousness.

God’s character is such that He longs to be merciful to His people. Those who put their trust in God receive, not punishment, but His grace and goodness in abundance. Even when God disciplines us as His children, He has our good in view (Hebrews 12:4–11). When it comes to dealing with His children, God ever and always acts in perfect love.

Father, thank You for reminding me that Your heart is to heal and restore my life and to bring me near to You in love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Transformed, Not Conformed

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Scripture: Romans 12:1–8

Song: “Take My Life”

Recently, my husband and I were listing technological changes that have happened in our lifetime. We remember when answering machines seemed like the height of convenience. Now look at where we are! Nearly all of us carry phones in our pockets or wear them on our wrists. I'm all for technology, but having quick-and-easy access to so much information is often distracting and, at times, overwhelming.

Avoiding conformity to the world's pattern doesn't mean we stop engaging with the world around us, but it does mean that we don't live according to any ungodly ways or mindsets. It means we don't just embrace what the world says is good, if Scripture says it isn't. Instead of conforming, we are called to live as people who are being transformed, having our minds renewed by the Holy Spirit, who brings our thinking in line with the truth.

Pursuing a renewed mind while living in this noisy world can be a challenge. Living as people who seek God's wisdom and ways requires our focused attention. We can open ourselves up to the work of transformation by regularly spending time with our Heavenly Father and prayerfully taking in His Word.

Father, thank for Your work of transformation in my life. Please renew my mind even now and fill me with Your wisdom and discernment as I make my way through the day ahead.

Overcome with Good

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Scripture: Romans 12:9–21

Song: “Surrounded”

Janice was surprised when suddenly her coworker went from warm and friendly to distant and cold for no apparent reason. In an attempt to understand, Janice tried talking with her but to no avail. Then the coworker sent a scathing email with some vague accusations. Not long after this, the woman left the company. Sometime later, Janice ran into her former colleague at a conference. When she saw the woman, it seemed as though the Lord was prompting, *Go hug her*. With this conviction in her heart, Janice walked right up to her and gave her a hug. The woman, stiff and confused at first, melted into her arms.

Paul gives us two directives: don't be overcome by evil, and overcome evil with good. In the preceding verses, Paul gives an extensive list of how to do this. Interestingly enough, it all boils down to the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself.

It takes a great deal of strength to put aside selfish tendencies so as not to be overcome by evil. I have felt self-righteousness rising up in me, compelling me to “set the record straight,” and I have struggled to swallow my pride so as to honor someone above myself. When we give in to ego, we are being overcome by evil; but when we choose to love others above ourselves, we are overcoming evil with good.

Father, give me the courage and humility to not be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with Your goodness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Just Ask

[God told Moses to tell the people,] “It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:17).

Scripture: Leviticus 1:3–17

Song: “Living Sacrifice”

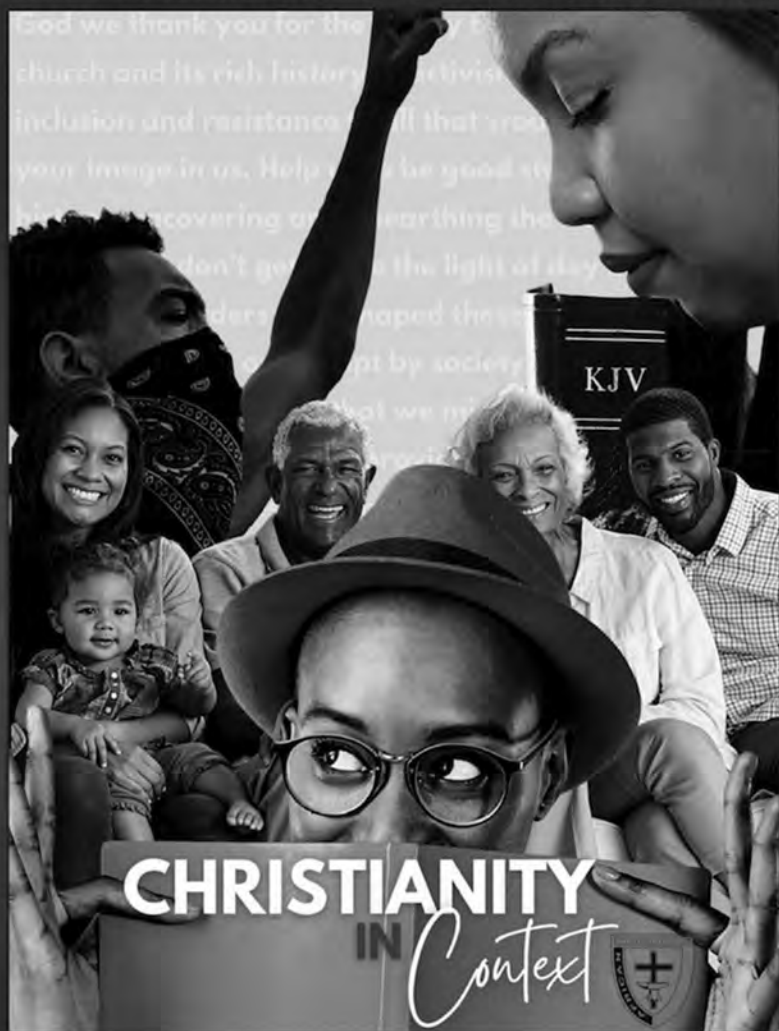
I am not a meticulous person, so I’m in awe of people who are. Even trying to do a jigsaw puzzle stresses me out. Not too long ago on social media, I saw a woman who was trying to lose weight. Her method was to weigh everything she ate. It worked for her. She had great success. But to be honest, as soon as I saw the weigh-your-food part of the protocol, I quickly scrolled to the next post.

As I read about the intricacies of the atonement sacrifice in Leviticus, words like *tedious* and *laborious* come to mind. Thankfully, these types of sacrifices are no longer required because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus took sin, shame, and death on himself so that we could be free from them.

Sometimes, though, I struggle to fully rest in this freedom. At times I’m tempted to try doing more to gain God’s acceptance. There’s part of me that feels like if I could do something to earn it, then I would deserve it. Sort of like those puzzles I mentioned: if I would actually complete one, I know I would take great pride in it. But that’s just the thing: we can’t add anything that we can be proud of to the sacrifice Jesus made. We can only humbly receive His saving grace.

Father, thank You that for me to receive Your forgiveness, I need only ask You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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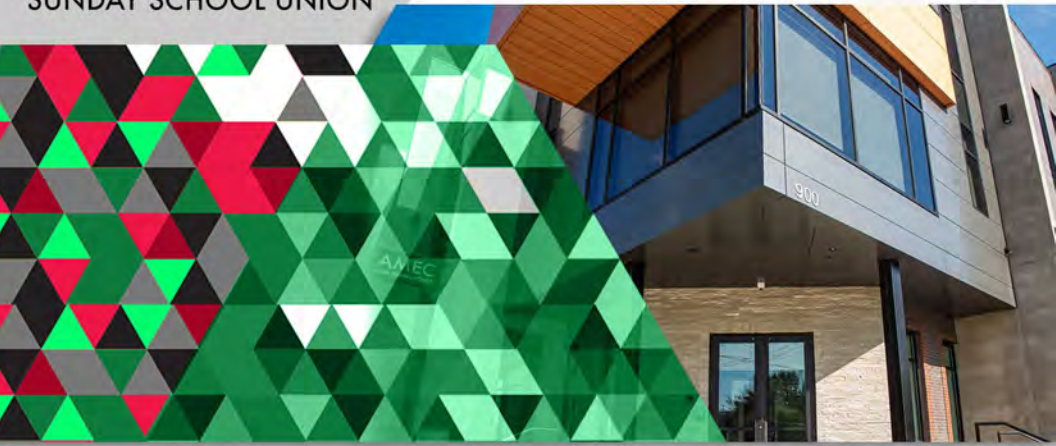
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