



SAMPLE

HOPE IN
THE LORD

THE SILENT MOMENT

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SUMMER QUARTER 2024

Vol. 41

JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

No. 3

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THE SILENT MOMENT—USPS 737-070

The Silent Moment (USPS 737-070) is published quarterly for \$20.00 / year by AMEC Sunday School Union, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, Tennessee 37212. Periodicals postage paid at Nashville, TN. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Silent Moment*, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, Tennessee 37212.

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The Silent Moment

This I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
—— Lamentations 3:21-22



June-August 2024

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Hope in the Lord

God's people are supremely blessed to live in the peace of a sure hope! Those who belong to Him are blessed to be loved by Him, to be serving Him, and to be able to pray to Him—the one true God who is almighty, perfect in wisdom, and full of mercy. He created all that is, sustains it each moment. He has physically and personally intervened in our fallen world through His Son, Jesus, who poured out His sacrificial love. Jesus died in our place, was buried, and then rose again to life to redeem us. This is the grace by which we can be saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Maybe you've lived in this hope since you can remember, having received salvation as a young child. Or perhaps you've come to know the solid hope of salvation later in life. It might even be that you've recently been saved by placing your trust in Christ for the washing away of your sin and have come into newness of life in Him and are experiencing the sweet relief and joy it brings. If so, welcome to the family of God! God's people rejoice with you, and Heaven does too (Luke 15:10)!

There is also a chance that you're reading this devotional and you're not full of hope, not sure of your future, not sure of your standing with God. If that is you, I'd like to extend a heartfelt welcome to you. In these pages you will read about a hope that cannot be shaken apart or taken away by life's circumstances. It's the hope that comes from recognizing God's goodness and His trustworthiness. It comes from understanding His desire to help us and heal our hearts. And it is established in our hearts when we receive His gift of saving grace through faith—His complete forgiveness for *all* our sin and His promise of eternal life with Him.

It's an invitation from God's heart of love for you, and it's yours to take or leave, but I hope you will want to receive it. I've never

regretted one moment of belonging to Him, being cared for by Him, and knowing that my hope in Him is going to be met one day with more goodness than I could have ever imagined: “It is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’—the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:10). If you put your trust in Him, He will bring you into a life of secure hope and lead you home by that path.

But don’t just take my word for it. There are many testimonies of God’s faithfulness in the pages of this booklet. No matter where you are on the path of life, I pray your hope in the Lord will be renewed and be made strong.

Peace to your heart!

Christine Dallman, Editor

Needless Fretting

[Jesus said,] “Why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin” (Matthew 6:28).

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Song: “The Lord Will Provide”

A few years ago, I flew from Thailand to Nashville for a conference. I packed most of my dress clothes in a checked bag. Fortunately, I dressed business casual for the flight and packed an extra set of nice clothes in a carry-on. The next several days were comically stressful because I didn't receive my luggage for the conference or return flight. By the time I got home, I felt like the most disheveled traveler in Asia.

In today's passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus eloquently rebukes our tendency to worry. At first His words appear bewildering. Who of us wouldn't be concerned about our life, our body, or having adequate food and clothing? Jesus' point is not that these things are unimportant but that we can trust our good, perfect, and loving Heavenly Father to provide what we need.

Jesus' teaching provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our own frets and fears. We can take some time right now to identify what is creating anxiety within us and turn these things over to God in prayer.

Father, I confess my worry to You and leave these cares with You today. I will trust You to provide for my needs. Thank You for caring for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Full-Grown Faith

. . . God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ (Colossians 1:27-28).

Scripture: Colossians 1:24—2:3

Song: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

As a father, teacher, and campus minister, I’ve had the privilege of watching many young people grow up. Watching my own children develop from birth into their twenties has been a highlight of my life. Working in a K-12 school and in a university setting has also allowed me to watch children mature from brand-new kindergartners to college graduates who are ready to get married and launch careers.

As spectacular as it is to watch children develop, it is even more awe-inspiring to see Christians mature spiritually. In today’s passage, Paul teaches that spiritual maturity is a core outcome of the Christian faith. But unlike the biological development of children, this spiritual growth doesn’t happen naturally. Rather, it is the result of Christ’s work in us.

However, just as students must persevere in their studies to obtain a diploma, so Christians, to grow and mature in faith, must be attentive, learning God’s ways and keeping in step with His Spirit. Ultimately, spiritual growth involves being open to Christ’s work within our hearts and minds, a work that transforms our innermost being.

Father, as I seek to become mature in Christ, thank You for Your Spirit’s work in me to bring about spiritual growth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Gospel-Centered Home

Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him (Acts 28:30-31, *KJV*).

Scripture: Acts 28:23-31

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

Welcome! Make yourself at home! Come on in and sit a spell!

I’ve seen signs with messages such as these hanging in my friends’ homes. While it’s unlikely that Paul had any such wall décor as he awaited trial in Rome, such a sign would have been fitting, given his practice of welcoming people and talking with them about Jesus.

Homes have many purposes: they shelter us from weather, protect us from wildlife and other dangers, and provide a place for us to raise a family and welcome friends. Some houses—like drug houses—are instead used for harmful purposes. But how we use our homes is up to us.

Paul used his rented home as a place for people to gather to hear about Jesus. He used it as a place to share the gospel. What a great example he set for us!

Father, I want the place where I dwell to be more than mere shelter. Use my home as a place to welcome others and share Your love and truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Fearing God

It came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled (Exodus 19:16, *KJV*).

Scripture: Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25

Song: “How Great Thou Art”

On Independence Day many years ago, my husband and I took our two-year-old son to watch our neighborhood fireworks. We love fireworks and thought he would too. We couldn't have been more wrong! The loud explosions and bright flashes frightened him. He buried his face in my husband's chest and cried. We didn't stay long.

Today's Scripture passage tells of a time when God's presence descended on Mount Sinai, and it affected the people much like those fireworks affected my young son. They saw the lightning flashing, felt the mountain shaking, and heard the thunder and trumpet sounding. As the people trembled at this revelation of God's holiness and power, they recognized that God is to be feared—to be regarded with complete reverence.

As believers we have come to know God's abundant mercy through Christ's atoning work on the cross. Yet, we need to remember that God is still to be treated with reverence. He loves us, forgives us, and allows us to approach Him in prayer. But He is still a holy and awesome God who calls us to treat Him as holy and to walk before Him in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Father, help me treat You with reverence in my thoughts, words, and actions. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28).

Scripture: Hebrews 12:18-29

Song: “On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand”

If you’ve ever vigorously shaken a can of soda pop and then opened or punctured it, you know what happens. The contents spew out, and the mini explosion makes a relatively innocuous mess. It’s a far more serious matter, however, when areas of planet earth get shaken: items in homes fall and get broken, buildings crack and crumble, and people are sometimes injured or even killed. Few things in life get our attention like a big quake does.

In yesterday’s passage, we read about how God’s presence descended on Mount Sinai and shook the ground on which the people stood. Given how scary earthquakes can be, it’s no wonder they were frightened! In today’s passage we read about a different mountain—Mount Zion. And in this instance, the book of Hebrews is referring to an *eternal* mountain, one that cannot be shaken, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22).

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was originally a Jebusite fortress on Mount Zion. But when King David captured it, it also became known as the City of David (2 Samuel 5:6-7). The Mount Zion in today’s passage, however, is referring to a future, unshakable city where God Himself will dwell forever among His people.

Father, thank You for the promise of Your unshakable kingdom! I want to worship You gratefully with reverence and awe, now and forever. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Prayer: A Powerful Spiritual Weapon

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31).

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Song: “Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul”

In a 1946 edition of her book *So This Is Africa*, Susan Anderson wrote, “I say it reverently, if God were to answer every prayer we made, I think we should have to stop praying or become much more wise [sic] than we are now. We should be about as safe on our knees as at the controls of one of our great bomber planes—loaded.”

I own a copy of this book, and although it is out of print now, I have always loved this quote. It’s a reminder that prayer has the potential to be powerful when we pray wisely. In today’s passage we can take note of the way the early Christians prayed. They raised their voices *together* (agreed in prayer). They addressed their prayers to God and praised Him. They recalled Scripture and declared how God had already worked. Then, finally, they offered their petitions to the Lord. We can learn much from this passage about praying effectively.

While Anderson was a World War II-era missionary to Nigeria, I agree with her still today: we need to be wise in our prayer lives! Like weapons in physical warfare, our prayers can be powerful weapons for God’s glory in each spiritual battle we face (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Father, teach me how to pray more effectively. Make me “more wise” in my prayers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Ultimate Beauty

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant (Exodus 34:29).

Scripture: Exodus 34:28-35

Song: “Beautiful, Beautiful, Jesus Is Beautiful”

Botox, fillers, chemical peels, tanning gel, makeup. Some folks go to great lengths to try to get their faces to appear more beautiful. This is not a new pursuit. Back in Old Testament times, we read of Esther undergoing weeks of beauty treatments before she was presented to King Xerxes as a candidate to become his queen (Esther 2:1-12). In fact, beauty techniques can be found in cultures worldwide. As a child growing up in Africa, I used to hear advertisements for a specific brand of petroleum jelly, claiming that it can “make your face shine like a ripe papaya.”

In today’s passage, Moses’ face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God there. Moses wasn’t even trying to improve his looks or make his face shine. He was simply spending time with God, and that was its effect.

When we consistently spend time with God, we are changed too. We might not have faces that shine like Moses’ did, but our lives will radiate God’s love and His ways as we study and learn them. Time in God’s presence transforms us. It softens our hearts and focuses our minds on things that are good, pure, and eternal.

Father, thank You for drawing me near to You. As I seek You, grant me a heart that longs to be with You, and then use me to reflect Your heart and Your ways to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

On Being Courageous

[Moses said to the people,] “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified . . . , for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Song: “So Send I You”

Dr. David Livingstone (1813–1873) was a Scottish physician and pioneer missionary to Africa. As he traveled and shared the gospel message, he encountered many hardships and obstacles—including being attacked by a lion! Not only did Dr. Livingstone tell the African people about Jesus and tend to their illnesses when he could, he also mapped portions of Africa that were, except for trade routes, unknown to the outside world.

One summer some years ago, I taught the children at my church about missions. There was no curriculum, so I wrote my own. We studied many missionaries, beginning with the apostle Paul. Perhaps the children’s favorite missionary that summer was Dr. Livingstone (although Lottie Moon of China came in a close second).

How could the apostle Paul, David Livingston, Lottie Moon, and all of the other courageous missionaries take on the unknown, including the many hardships they endured in their efforts to share the gospel? They knew what Moses told God’s people in today’s passage: that God would never leave them nor forsake them. And this truth can still encourage us today to be brave as we bring the gospel message with us wherever we go.

Father, thank You for Your promise to always be with me. Let this truth spark new courage in my heart today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

By God's Power

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:5-18

Song: "There Is Power in the Blood"

The Yoruba people of Africa have an expression: *l'agbara Olorun*. It means "by the power of God." The backstory for this saying is contained in a short parable: A man announces that tomorrow he will fix his bridge, but the next day it rains, and so he can't. So again he says that tomorrow he will fix the bridge, but again something interferes. Finally, he says that tomorrow *l'agbara Olorun* he will fix his bridge, and the next day he fixes it.

I grew up among the Yoruba people and have heard this phrase all my life. My children know it too, since they have heard me say it many times. We have a similar expression in English that we sometimes use when we announce our plans and add, "Lord willing." In both cultures, we are acknowledging that, although we may have hopes and intentions, we are actually not the ones in control. God alone is in ultimate control.

The verse for today contains a similar acknowledgment, but the full passage says so much more. God has purpose in His power and control: He intends to raise us up, give us competence and hope, make us bold, and ultimately transform us into His glorious image.

Father, You are in control of this world and of my life, and You use the things You allow in my life to conform me more and more to Your image. Thank You! In Jesus' name, amen.

True Leadership

[Jesus said,] “The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

Scripture: Luke 22:25-30

Song: “O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee”

I lunched with a man who had served very successfully as president of a statewide nonprofit organization. I asked whether he had guiding principles that shaped his work. “Leading isn’t complicated,” he said with a smile. “Leadership means adding benefit to the lives of others. I can best lead the organization by serving the people who make up the organization.”

My friend’s leadership style certainly reflects the life and teaching of Christ. Jesus did not gather followers by looking down on others. Instead, the ministry of Jesus consisted of healing, feeding, and teaching. He modeled being like the lowly table servant who brings the food, fills the drinking cups, and clears away the dishes. Jesus rose to lordship by first kneeling in servanthood.

Jesus reminds us that authority is not about demanding our own way, and leadership is no excuse for special privileges. I am certainly grateful for the power of the risen Christ, but what draws me most is His servant-like love that washed feet and carried the cross. If I make any mark in the world, it will be by following—and living like—Jesus.

Father, give me courage to walk the path of true greatness, the way of loving and humble service. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Love Letters

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1).

Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Song: “Lord, I Have Made Thy Word My Choice”

As a young man, I spent one summer traveling in Europe. I slept on a rooftop in Greece, hiked a Swiss glacier, ascended the Eiffel Tower, and descended into an Austrian salt mine. However, among these grand adventures, the high points of my summer were the letters from a certain young woman back home. Nothing thrilled me as much as a message from my bride-to-be. Decades later, I still have those letters.

In both of his New Testament books, Luke dedicates his writing to Theophilus. Some scholars believe Theophilus was a particular person, a patron of Luke's. Others point out that the name *Theophilus* literally means “lover of God” and may be symbolic, Luke's way of welcoming all God-loving readers into his stories of Jesus and the early church.

Whatever Luke's intention, our appreciation is so much deeper if we approach the pages of Scripture as a lover of God. It's difficult to comprehend that the Lord of the universe loves us enough to send a whole book of messages for us to read! But when I open my Bible, I find letters from my true home, messages from God's heart to mine. How exciting to receive these “love letters” from God! No wonder I keep reading!

Father, thank You for the Bible! Through Your living and active Word, speak to me of Your love today, leaving me hungry for more. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dressing for Blessing

He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 61

Song: “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”

Friends insist I have no sense of matching colors, and I have endured a lot of good-natured kidding about my clothing choices. One acquaintance challenged me to take a test for color discrimination. When I scored above average, she shook her head in mock sadness. “Now we know,” she said. “Good vision, but poor taste.”

I only hope to be better dressed spiritually than I am physically! Isaiah exults that God dresses His people in garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. The prophet compares the wardrobe of faith with the priestly turban of spotless white linen adorned with a gold plaque inscribed with the words *Holy to the Lord*. What a vivid image of life in Christ!

As I go about my days, I remind myself that I am clothed in righteousness. When we wear our dress-up clothes, we try to avoid stains and grime. In a good suit or a new dress, we’re generally on our best behavior. In the same way, when we are clothed in salvation, we don’t want to wallow in sin or practice habits that will soil our spirits. Although we don’t have a literal gold sign on our heads, our lifestyle can proclaim that we are holy (set apart) to the Lord. And if we live in that frame of heart and mind, it doesn’t really matter if our clothes don’t match!

Father, help me as I seek to match my outward deeds to the inward grace of Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Harmony

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1).

Scripture: Psalms 133–134

Song: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

When I joined my first choir, I learned that making music with others is not like singing solos in the shower. I didn't get to choose my own key or set the tempo. For that matter, I didn't even get to select the song. Instead, I learned my part, sang when it was my turn, and blended my voice with the voices of others. Under the guidance of the conductor, our different voices became a unit. Together, we sounded better than any of us singing alone.

Since the Psalms were originally written for singing, the psalmist probably knew something about choirs. When he celebrates the goodness of God's people living in unity, maybe he is applying choral lessons to life within the family of faith. I've been a member of many groups, but the church surpasses them all in mutual support, encouragement, forgiveness, and fellowship. Although the church isn't perfect, it's the best community I've ever found.

Of course, just as a choir depends on the conductor, the church is healthiest and happiest when we faithfully follow our Conductor. The teachings of Jesus provide the invitation that draws us together, and the living presence of Christ supplies the love that holds us together. In other words, Christ himself is the unity we Christians seek. Christ is the key and pitch to which we tune our lives. The result is good and pleasant, indeed!

Father, I pray that You will bring Your children together not only in word and voice, but in heart and spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

Common Ground

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called (Ephesians 4:4).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-7

Song: “The Church’s One Foundation”

As a camp counselor, I enjoyed taking the seven boys in my cabin to the obstacle course. Left to themselves, the more athletic campers would leave the others behind, but the goal was for everyone to complete the course together. Boys of varying builds, backgrounds, and beliefs enthusiastically stooped, hoisted, piggy-backed, and yelled encouragement until every camper succeeded. That moment of intense sharing was always a vital step in a group of diverse strangers becoming a camp family.

Church congregations are also made up of all kinds. Rising above our differences to become a genuine family in Christ can be tougher than running an obstacle course. Paul teaches that we can build a community of faith by focusing on what we have in common: one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father. In the light of how much we share, our differences become less distracting.

When some church members aren’t “acting very Christian,” I remind myself of our common ground. We are all forgiven sinners, at times falling short of God’s vision as we struggle to become more like Jesus. That makes it easier for me to practice the humility, patience, and gentleness that Paul encourages. Sometimes I get it right. And when I don’t, I hope others will be gentle and patient with me.

Father, I praise You that Christ is at work in all Your children, and that together we share the great grace that unites us in Your family. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Tending the Gift

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-13

Song: “Take Time to Be Holy”

My first bicycle was a shiny, blue beauty with a banana seat and butterfly handlebars. I didn't know how to ride yet, though, so I worked at it. There's no telling how many times I fell, how often I crashed, or how many scrapes and bruises I accumulated. Nonetheless, I did learn to ride that bike. Over the years, as I grew into my bicycle, it became my best friend.

Many gifts demand effort to make good use of them. This is true of God's gift of salvation. Yes, salvation is a gift, but God invites us to grow into that gift by exerting effort toward becoming mature. Thus, Paul invites us to work out our salvation. He is encouraging us to make the most of God's gift. The Holy Spirit prompts us toward prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, good works, and godly living—all proven ways to work out our salvation.

When Paul mentions “fear and trembling,” I believe he is underlining the importance of showing reverence for the gift. Fortunately, the same God who saves us does not leave us to ourselves to grow in holiness. He works in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, stirring in us the desire to walk uprightly. Then God encourages us to follow through, putting our salvation into action. Along the way, we experience the joy of a gift well-received and well-tended.

Father, I will seek to grow into my salvation daily, increasing in faithfulness to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Leaky Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him (Romans 15:13).

Scripture: Romans 15:1-13

Song: “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

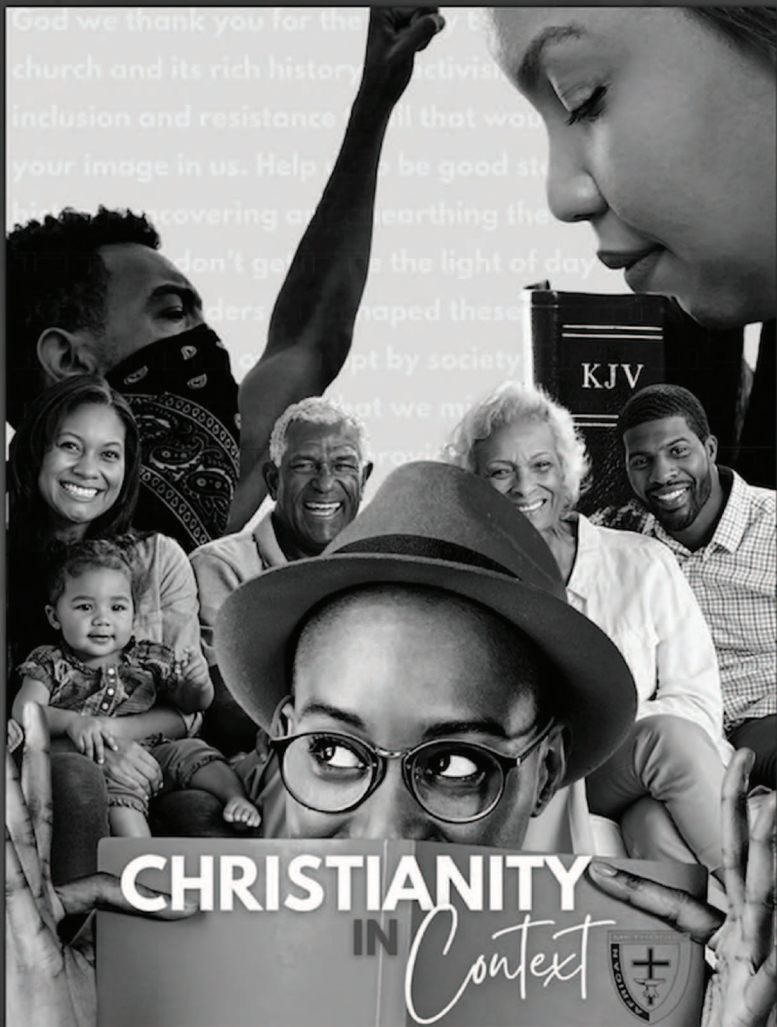
On a picnic at the park, I grilled the hot dogs for varied preferences, charring some and lightly striping others. When I reached for my lemonade, the cup was empty. I had failed to notice a crack in the bottom of it, and though the ice remained, the lemonade had leaked away and soaked into the grass without leaving me a sip.

I have the same problem with hope. I know hope is important, but mine keeps leaking. Paul says that our God is the God of hope, and then the apostle prays that his readers may overflow with hope. I pray for this too, but every time I open a newspaper or overhear a news program, my hope seeps out from a broken heart. So I tell myself once again that God is in charge. I remind myself that nothing we hope for is too big for our God, whether it's hope for healing our hurting world, justice for the weak, peace among nations and races, or renewal of God's good creation.

Yes, these are huge hopes, but I refuse to give them up. I keep clinging to God's promises, and God's Spirit keeps topping off my leaky heart. I get through the dark places with God's help, and someday (hopefully) my hope will overflow.

Father, all things are in Your hands, and all will be well in the end. Light my way with hope, peace, and joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

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