



**EXAMINING  
OUR FAITH**

## THE SILENT MOMENT

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# The Silent Moment

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.  
— Psalm 119:59 (KJV)



March-May 2024

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## Examining Our Faith

Last quarter I wrote that faith that pleases God is not mired in self-evaluation, yet this quarter's theme is about examining our faith! What gives here? Aren't these two ideas at odds? Let's dive into this apparent contradiction and sort it out.

“I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes” (Psalm 119:59). This banner verse for the quarter holds a clue for us regarding the distinction between the kind of self-evaluation that produces fear and pride and the kind of fruitful examination of our faith that brings reconciliation and peace. Notice that the psalm writer's self-examination wasn't according to the standards of his culture, his coworkers, his friends, his family, or even his own moral code. His standard was God's statutes, God's Word. Looking into God's Word, the psalmist allowed *it* to examine, inform, and correct how he lived out his faith.

Another clue to the difference between mere self-evaluation and legitimate examination of our faith is our goal. A person who seeks to do all the right things to be OK in God's sight and/or in other people's sight has set an impossible goal. How does he or she ever know if the checklist for attaining good standing is complete, let alone doing everything on it? Even the Pharisees couldn't keep up with this system of self-evaluation. They had, in fact, become so obsessive about details and appearances, that they had missed the big picture. Jesus rebuked them and their system: “You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Mathew 23:24). However, if our goal is to pursue God's ways, not by a checklist of dos and don'ts, but by seeking to walk in truth, then uprightness and peace will be the result (Hebrews 12:11).

Finally, as we peer into God's Word (rather than looking around us for our cues) and as we seek the truth (rather than checklists and

right answers), we will come into the place of freedom and joy as God’s Spirit faithfully leads us. We don’t need to anxiously examine ourselves, trying to find our cracks, flaws, and faults. Remember, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

As we remain prayerfully in God’s Word, His Spirit will point out the way of obedience to us. He will grant us clear conviction, humility for repentance, authentic joy, and His perfect peace as He continually works to root and establish our faith in God’s ways of truth and love (John 14:15-17, 25-27).

Peace to your heart!

**Christine Dallman, Editor**

March 1

## A Life to Remember

**Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away** (Genesis 5:24).

**Scripture:** Genesis 5:18-24

**Song:** “Step by Step”

Whenever I’m at a cemetery, I wonder what kind of lives the people buried there led. Some grave markers shed light on that question. Recently I saw an online epitaph for an athlete that said, “Well played” and then quoted lines from a 1941 poem by Grantland Rice (1880–1954): “For when the Great Scorer comes / To write against your name, / He writes not that you won or lost / But how you played the game.”

In the Genesis 5 genealogy, one of the entries doesn’t follow the typical pattern of telling how many years a patriarch lived before dying. The verses about Enoch indicate that after the birth of his first son, he had a turning point (Genesis 6:5) and began living in close fellowship with God. Then 300 years later, God took Enoch from the earth.

Our lives don’t have to follow the typical pattern of the society around us. Each of us can have our own turning point, whether that is receiving God’s gift of salvation or, as a believer, repenting of complacency, disobedience, or blatant sin. Each of us can walk with God as Enoch did.

**Father,** I commit to walking closely with You until You take me home. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## One Perfect Example

**Certain individuals . . . have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (Jude 4).**

**Scripture:** Jude 3-16

**Song:** “Thou Art Worthy”

In recent years some popular Bible teachers have announced their new “enlightened” view, straying from sound biblical doctrine. A bestselling author shared that his faith had “progressed” to an understanding that the concept of Jesus’ deity is an error. And a few well-known Christians have declared their total loss of faith. The fallout from these cases can be devastating for those who admire and follow these individuals.

In Old Testament days, unbelievers slipped in among God’s people, creating conflict and pulling people away from trusting and obeying their Lord. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to such deceivers as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15) and weeds among wheat (Matthew 13:38). Sometimes such false teachers openly promote sin; more often they’re harder to detect as they subtly manipulate God’s teachings and bring deception.

We can protect ourselves by saturating our minds with God’s Word. We can also remember to keep our eyes on Jesus, the source and object of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Committed Christians may earn our respect, but only Jesus is worthy of our adoration. And His teachings are eternal; they never change.

**Father,** help me to keep my doctrine and lifestyle firmly grounded in Your Word and in Jesus’ example. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 3

## Tending House

**You, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love** (Jude 20-21).

**Scripture:** Jude 17-25

**Song:** "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"

My oldest son, Eric, works as a project manager for a commercial construction company. So far, all of his job sites have been on the campus of a large nearby university that is home to many historic buildings, some more than 100 years old. The constant need for updates and remodeling provides plenty of work for Eric's company and others. Occasionally, an old building has been so neglected that the university hires someone to demolish it.

If a building is left to itself, it will deteriorate to the point of not being usable. In today's passage, Jude employs the idea of building up and maintaining faith, much like a physical structure requires, reminding us that our Christian faith must also be tended to and constantly strengthened. Our lives are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. We are to continue building up our faith through sincere prayer, studying God's Word, and walking in obedience to His commands. If we neglect these things, we will grow spiritually weak and worldly.

As we stay in close fellowship with God, our faith will grow stronger. We'll develop a deeper awareness of His truth and love, compelling us to share the gospel message with others. Then we will have the privilege of helping build up His kingdom, not just our own houses.

**Father,** I seek Your wisdom to live according to the blueprint of Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.



## Wisdom to Mature

**If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you (James 1:5).**

**Scripture:** James 1:2-12

**Song:** “When Trials Come”

Amy Carmichael, best known as a missionary to India, understood suffering. Neuralgia—painful nerve damage that was often debilitating—kept her in bed for weeks or months at a time. When an eventual fall kept her bedridden for the rest of her life, Amy continued to serve, acting as a spiritual mother to many orphans and writing prolifically about missions and faith. Her lifetime of trust in God provided the wisdom she needed to bear suffering well.

In today’s passage, James knew his readers would face difficulties, and he wanted them to be well-prepared. He wanted them to be able to experience joy in the midst of their trials, knowing these ordeals would result in maturity. But for maturity to come, these believers would need one essential thing: wisdom. Wisdom would allow them to see things from a spiritual perspective and to continue in faith, allowing trials to do their purifying work.

In difficult times, it’s easy to toss opportunities for patience and endurance out the window and to wallow in grief or frustration. But let’s choose, instead, to follow James’ instruction and ask God for the wisdom we need to persevere.

**Father,** I ask You for wisdom to endure patiently in difficulty and hard times. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## True Goodness

**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows** (James 1:17).

**Scripture:** James 1:13-18

**Song:** “How Great Thou Art”

Television ads for restaurants are all about inducing craving. The way the camera focuses on the melting cheese or smooth chocolate is designed to make viewers crave what the advertiser offers. Interestingly, one extremely effective solution to these cravings is very simple: eating proper meals and drinking plenty of water. When our bodies are well-hydrated and filled with proper nutrients, we become far less likely to crave something we don't really need or that isn't good for us.

In today's passage, after James clarifies that temptation is not from God but is a result of our own desires, he tells his readers what *does* come from God: every good and perfect gift. The language in verse 17—*good, perfect, heavenly lights, and does not change*—provides a sharp contrast to words used to describe temptation in the previous verses—*evil, enticed, sin, death*. The truth of God's goodness is one of the most powerful weapons believers can use to combat the false “good” that temptation offers.

Reflecting on God's goodness can help us reject the enticements of temptation. No matter how good a temptation may look to us, it can never compare to the true light and goodness of our Father above. Let's take up this weapon, looking always to God in the battle for our minds.

**Father,** I want to reject what temptation offers and to keep Your true goodness before me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Even the Darkness

If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me . . . ,” even the darkness will not be dark to you (Psalm 139:11-12).

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:1-12

**Song:** “You Never Let Go”

Since adopting my dog, Hugo, I’ve gotten to know his quirks. I know he loves to be scratched behind the ears. I know he rarely barks but will “talk” due to his Husky heritage. I know he’s afraid of baths and birthday candles. I know he struggles not to jump when he’s excited and not to get too close to people’s plates when he smells chicken. These idiosyncrasies, though they might be annoying to some, only make me love Hugo more . . . because he’s mine.

Psalm 139 reveals that the Lord had searched David thoroughly: God knew David’s actions, his thoughts, and his words. We know from other Scripture that David’s actions and words were sometimes far from holy, that he sinned greatly, and that the Lord knew all of it. Yet the Lord’s intimate knowledge of David’s flaws didn’t cause Him to reject David. God’s faithful love remained steadfast.

When I examine my own heart, I sometimes wonder how God can know me so well and still love me. But Scripture passages such as this one remind me that God remains with me even when I’m tempted to hide in the darkness. Even when we mess up, God won’t reject us. Let’s draw near to Him today and receive His forgiveness, help, and healing.

**Father,** I confess my messes to You, right now, and trust in Your love and forgiveness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 7

## The Way Everlasting

**Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting** (Psalm 139:23-24).

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

**Song:** “He Leadeth Me”

When sea turtles hatch, they head immediately for the water. Leatherback sea turtles are big travelers and may journey as many as 10,000 miles through the ocean each year. Yet they always return to the beach where they were born to have their young. Scientists are unsure exactly how sea turtles find their way to their original beaches, but they suspect ocean currents, water chemistry, and even the earth’s magnetic field may play a role. However it happens, sea turtles know their way home.

As Psalm 139 continues, David marvels at God’s knowledge, describing how He knows even David’s point of origin in his mother’s womb. Then David once more requests that God search and know him, pleading for God to lead him “in the way everlasting” (v. 24). This is the culmination of letting God examine us: being led by Him in the way we need to go.

Thankfully, unlike sea turtles, we don’t have to rely on our own abilities to get us where we need to go. God knows where we have come from and where we are going. Because He knows us intimately, we can trust Him to lead us down the right path. And ultimately, His path—the way everlasting—will lead us home.

**Father,** please show me the path I should take. Lead me in the way everlasting. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Heaviest Burden

**Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?** (2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

**Song:** “He Knows”

When I worked at an inner-city educational ministry, it wasn't the long hours, low pay, or tough neighborhood that were hardest to deal with. It was the accounts I heard from the kids themselves. For example, there was the boy who came in with bruises from a fight with some neighborhood kids; there was a little girl who was afraid her mom would be deported; and then there were kids with behavior struggles who had started to believe they were “bad” kids. Stories like these were of more concern to me than my own struggles because I cared so deeply for these young ones.

After listing his own severe trials, Paul lists, at the end, the one that seems to weigh most heavily on his heart: the concern he feels for all the churches. Surely he was picturing specific individuals he had mentored and cared for as he wrote these words.

If you've ever been a spouse, parent, son, daughter, brother, sister, or friend to someone in crisis, you know this feeling as well. Yet, even in this pain, God is present and His grace is sufficient for us. We can bring these emotional burdens to Him and trust Him to care for those we are concerned about.

**Father,** You know the burdens that weigh heaviest on my heart. I entrust these loved ones to Your care. In Jesus' name, amen.

## The Solution of Presence

**Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).**

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

**Song:** “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”

Several years ago I traveled to China, and my first flight was delayed due to weather. I prayed to make my connecting flight—and then missed it by just a few minutes. The next available flight was a day later, so I found a nearby hotel, frustrated by the delay. The next day, I ended up seated in the same row as a Chinese American businessman. He generously chauffeured me through the Beijing airport, interpreting for me and directing me where to go. Looking back, I believe God answered my prayers not with the solution I’d hoped for, but with a person.

Because of Paul’s amazing visions, he was given a “thorn in his flesh” to keep him humble. Again and again, he pleaded for God to take the thorn away. But in the end, instead of acquiescing or giving Paul an explanation for his suffering, God responded with a promise of His presence. Even in Paul’s weakness, God’s grace was sufficient, and His power would be with him.

Sometimes God answers our prayers not with a solution but with a Person, the promise of His own presence in our suffering. No matter what problems we face—physical ailments, emotional sorrows, or “thorns in the flesh”—His grace is sufficient.

**Father,** thank You for being with me in my suffering. Help me to trust that Your answers to prayer are always best. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Sign of Strength

**He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you** (2 Corinthians 13:4).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

**Song:** "Jesus Paid It All"

Many animal defense mechanisms don't seem to make much sense. Opossums play dead, hairy frogs break their own bones, and sea cucumbers shoot out their own internal organs at attackers. Yet, the opossum's act can fool predators into leaving it alone, the frog's broken toe bones push through its skin to form claws, and the sea cucumber's regenerative organs are coated with poison. Each of these apparent weaknesses is actually the creature's strength.

Paul redefined the meaning of strength for the Corinthian believers. After spending several long passages "boasting" about his weakness, Paul draws a correlation to Christ. Christ was crucified in weakness, and when He died, even His closest followers thought it was the end of Him. But God turned that moment of what seemed to be Christ's greatest weakness into that of His greatest power through the Resurrection. Similarly, Christ's followers may appear weak to the world as they follow Christ's example of humility and love, but it's in that apparent weakness that God's power shines brightest.

We may sometimes be tempted to see ourselves as weak and failing by the world's standards, but what if our humble circumstances are the very place through which God's glory can shine the brightest?

**Father,** I trust that You are at work in and through my weakness to demonstrate Your goodness and greatness, not only to me but to others as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Stand Ready

**Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season**  
(2 Timothy 4:2).

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 4:1-8

**Song:** “Preach the Word”

A newborn baby is completely dependent on adult care. Step by step, the child will need to learn to perform life’s daily functions independently. However, until that day arrives, there’s work to be done! Starting on day one, caregivers provide what’s needed, ultimately leading to the day when the grown child launches out to live as the unique adult God created him or her to be.

In today’s passage, Timothy received instruction from the apostle Paul to be prepared to put into practice what he had been raised up in the faith to do. Paul reminded Timothy to stand ready “in season and out of season” to preach God’s Word (2 Timothy 4:2). Timothy was not born ready to lead the church and to preach. God first provided all that Timothy needed: a saving faith, a community of believers, spiritual gifting (1 Timothy 4:14), and a strong mentor.

In His faithfulness, God prepares us for and brings us into what He has for us to do. And just as a parent knows that a child will grow up long before the child knows this, so God has a plan that, while yet unknown to us, will provide all that we need, using everything we’ve been through for a future glory in service to Him.

**Father,** thank You for blessing me with the ability to serve You. In Jesus’ name, amen.



## Stop and Reflect

**[May] God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah** (Psalm 67:1, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Psalm 67

**Song:** “Wonderful, Merciful Savior”

A study conducted by the Federal Highway Administration revealed that 50 percent of drivers perform rolling stops when approaching a stop sign. Two common culprits for failing to obey this simple traffic law are driving while distracted and being in a hurry.

In today’s psalm we see the Hebrew word *selah* situated between two important verses. *Selah* appears 71 times in the the book of Psalms and 3 times in Habakkuk. This mysterious textual notation is not fully understood, but some scholars believe it indicates a place in the text (or music) for the reader (or musician) to stop and reflect upon what has just been read or sung. Seeing the word *selah* in today’s passage can serve as a reminder for us to us slow down and allow God’s Word to penetrate our hearts and transform our minds.

Are you distracted or hurried when it comes to approaching God daily? Or are you coming to Him with a calm and observant spirit? God is good, and He extends His mercy from Heaven all the way down to us on earth, providing what we need for each day. His face is not looking away from believers in disappointment, but it’s shining on us in love and delight (Luke 2:14). When we slow down to spend time with God, we enter a place of true rest and experience peace beyond comprehension (Philippians 4:6-7). *Selah!*

**Father,** as I go about my day, remind me to slow down and meditate on Your holy Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Start at Home

**Jesus . . . said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19).**

**Scripture:** Mark 5:1-2, 6-7, 11-20

**Song:** “Take the World, but Give Me Jesus”

After winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, Teresa of Calcutta (also known as Mother Theresa) said that the best way to spread love throughout our world is to start at home. Simply put, the world is impacted by how we love and interact with those closest to us.

After being set free from the demons that had controlled him, the man in today’s passage had one desire: to continue on with Jesus and follow wherever He went. Jesus, however, redirected the man’s zeal to fulfill a special purpose. Jesus sent him back home to tell about the wonderful things the Lord had done for him.

This story is a reminder that while the work of Christ is a vast, ongoing global endeavor, there is plenty of work to be done in the context of our own homes and communities. Those closest to us need to see the love of Jesus just as much as anyone else. Do those nearest to you know of the blessings with which Jesus has filled your life and how much He’s transformed you? It’s commendable to desire to tell the entire world about Jesus, but don’t forget to tell your family, friends, and neighbors!

**Father,** remind me daily not to overlook those right in front of me as I make Your salvation known. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Finding God's Will

**Ananias . . . said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17).**

**Scripture:** Acts 9:10-22

**Song:** “This Is My Story”

The Oregon Trail was a 2,000-mile rugged wagon-train route that began in Missouri and stretched westward into the Oregon Territory. While the pioneers who sought to settle these new regions saw great potential in westward expansion, inclement weather, dangerous river crossings, and death due to disease were just a few of the perils they faced on the journey. However, propelled by the ideals of Manifest Destiny, settlers packed their belongings, loaded their wagons, and, in faith, set out to seek a better life for themselves.

Ananias came to a fork in the road in his faith journey. When directed by God to make the trip to Straight Street, he immediately found a reason to question God's command. Understandably, Ananias was afraid, but despite his apprehensions about Saul, he ultimately moved forward in faith rather than shrinking back in fear.

Growing in a relationship with God requires faith, especially in the face of adversity. Obedience always leads us into the will of God, never away from it. If you're seeking to be on the right path, begin by doing what you know is right and good and true, even if it's scary or difficult, and then keep following that path.

**Father,** help me to be obedient as I follow Your path of righteousness today. In Jesus' name, amen.

March 15

## The Good Things of the Land

**[God said,] “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land”** (Isaiah 1:19).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:16-20

**Song:** “Victory Chant”

Over the last 50 years, 133 medals have been stripped from participants of the summer Olympic Games. The premise of the games is simple: work hard, follow the rules, and may the best person win. The reward for a competitor’s victory in any given event is to stand high on a podium and receive honor before the world. The Olympic medal is the culmination of everything for which participants strive, and it underscores the truism that hard work pays off. However, getting caught breaking the rules results in losing the reward.

The Old Testament account reveals that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah each had their fair share of ups and downs. Whenever a kingdom lived in obedience to God, it was showered with blessings. Whenever it disobeyed, going the opposite path of God’s instruction, it took giant steps backward, suffering painful consequences. Disobedience is never God’s will for His people. He has eternal rewards awaiting those who choose to seek Him and follow His instructions.

Whenever we attempt to make our own way instead of following the Lord, we’ll find ourselves in defeat, not victory. To move into the good things God has planned for our lives, we must begin with a mindset of obedience and a heart devoted to seeking God.

**Father,** help me to trust in Your strength and not my own as I live out my days in obedience to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Follow the Instructions

**They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for** (1 Peter 2:8).

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:4-12

**Song:** “Fully Surrendered”

A couple of summers ago, my wife and I bought a new house. One item on our to-do list was to plant hydrangeas. When putting them in, we didn't want to waste our time or our money, so to ensure that they grew strong and didn't wither, we carefully followed the planting instructions that came with each plant. Following these directions meant that we wouldn't have to worry that we'd made a mistake in our planting process. Our hydrangeas were virtually guaranteed to survive and thrive.

Obedience to the Lord puts His people on the path to experiencing His best for their lives. On the contrary, living in disobedience means living outside of God's will. When going the opposite way of God's Word, a person will stumble and struggle as they quickly find themselves on a path God cannot bless. Thankfully, the Bible's instruction is exactly what we need to ensure that our lives are growing and thriving. As we live to glorify Christ, our spirits will prosper in any season of life.

Blessings lie along the path of life when we make it our first priority to follow Jesus. When we follow the instruction God's Word sets out for us, our lives will grow, not wither. Obedience will always lead us into all that God has planned for our lives.

**Father,** my desire is to persevere in following Your instruction. Help me to walk in obedience all of my days. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Only the Lord!

**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing** (1 Peter 3:9).

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:8-17

**Song:** “Be Kind”

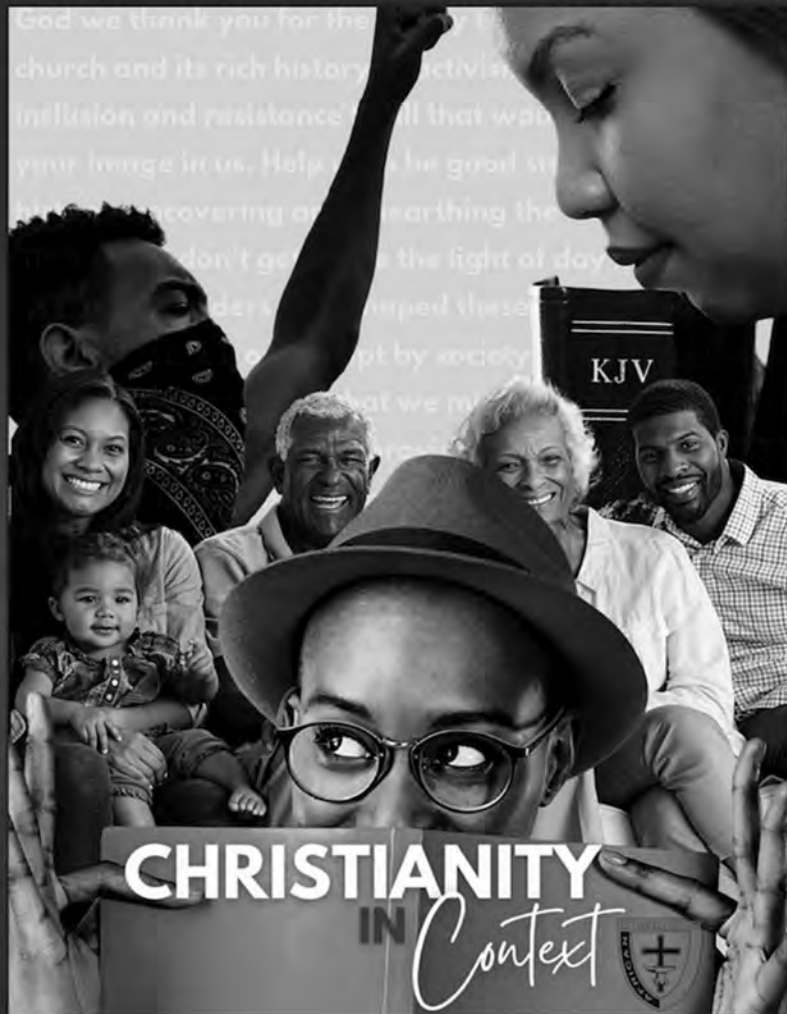
My wife always dreamt of having a garden. When we bought our first house together, we made her dream come true. Despite our discovery that the soil was extremely rocky, we were confident that if we cultivated the ground well and were attentive to the garden, it would all work out with the Lord’s help. Within weeks of planting, rows of corn began shooting straight up out of that rocky ground. We knew that only the Lord is able to do such a great work!

When we love others and show kindness, we are laying the groundwork for a future harvest. It may not always be easy to love or care for those who aren’t kind to you, but with every loving act, we are cultivating the ground God has given us, preparing for a great harvest.

From time to time we’ll find ourselves standing on relationally rocky ground. Maybe it’s someone who treats you badly or a co-worker who has a secret grudge against you. When these kinds of challenges arise, we can keep planting the good seed of kindness and working the ground of opportunity by showing love. Through God’s blessing, He will produce and provide good things, even against all odds. Only the Lord can do such a great work!

**Father,** thank You for giving me the strength necessary to plant good seeds so that I might reap great joy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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