

Hope Amid Misunderstanding

Jesus . . . rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Mark 8:33).

Scripture: Mark 8:31-37

Song: “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

Students can miss points on tests if they do not follow directions. Maybe the directions tell them to do two or more things, but they only do one. At other times, they do not understand what the directions ask. Either way, their grades are lower than if they had understood and followed directions.

Jews of the Old Testament period hoped for the Messiah, but many misunderstood the way He would arrive—and what His purpose would be. Peter was among them in the incident recorded in Mark 8. Peter had taken Jesus aside and rebuked Him for what He said (Mark 8:32). But Jesus, in turn, scolded Peter for holding on to “merely human concerns” (v. 33). Peter did eventually work through his wrong ideas.

God gives us His Spirit when we believe in Him, so “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Yet our humanity can still cause misunderstanding of God’s plan in situations and in our personal lives. But hope remains. Through prayer and Bible study, God aligns us with His purposes and gives wisdom to carry out His plan. Don’t let misunderstanding dampen your hope in Christ.

Father, in my moments of misunderstanding, guide me with Your perfect wisdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 9–15. **Martin Wiles** is an editor who has also authored six books and who has been published in numerous publications.

Do Good . . . Always

It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:17).

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:9-19

Song: "Do Something"

Whether a person was a friend or stranger mattered not to my paternal grandfather. He was a good man. Since he and my grandmother were like second parents to me, I viewed his lifestyle upclose, and I always saw good. Although he wasn't rich and his garden spot was small, he shared what he produced with family and friends. And although he and my grandmother could have used their annual income tax refund, he often gave it to me or to my parents if we had an unexpected expense. He did good . . . always.

Peter wrote to believers who had experienced persecution both intensely and regularly. Responding in an ungodly manner to those who wrongly mistreated them would have been easy, but Peter encouraged them to suffer, if necessary, for doing good. Doing good under their circumstances would shine the light of God's love into wickedness.

Bad actions abound. Watching and listening to both local and world news can be quite depressing, but God gives us the opportunity to fragrance our evil world with good deeds and helpful words. When we do, people might ask about our actions and intentions, and this will give us an opportunity to tell of the hope we have in Christ. God shows us opportunities to do good. Watch and be ready to respond.

Father, give me eyes to see the good I can do in my world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Be Faithful

“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (Revelation 2:10).

Scripture: Revelation 2:8-11

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Justin Martyr’s parents were pagans, but he found truth in Christ. Martyr was born in Flavia Neapolis, in Samaria, in AD 100. The way he defended his faith made him enemies. While in Rome, he and his disciples were arrested for their faith. The prefect asked him to denounce his faith by sacrificing to their gods. He refused. The authorities beat him and his friends and then beheaded them. Their fellow Christians rejoiced that their companions had remained faithful until death.

The risen Lord had words of commendation for the church at Smyrna. He admired their faithfulness despite the persecution the members endured. Some would die for their faithfulness to God, but Christ encouraged them to remain faithful to the end.

Faithfulness to God comes easily when our circumstances are pleasant. When difficult times come—whether unfortunate circumstances or persecution from others—remaining faithful becomes more challenging. If we are followers of Christ, our hope has already arrived—in the presence of God’s Spirit, who lives within us. He is the seal of our salvation and provides the strength we need to continue along the faithful path. A healthy prayer life and good Christian friends also equip us with power for faithfulness. Make sure you are prepared so you can remain faithful.

Father, thank You for the help You give me so I can remain faithful to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Only Blood Will Do

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4).

Scripture: Hebrews 10:1-10

Song: “Nothing but the Blood”

In the lower regions of South Carolina, deer hunters hunt with dogs. And when a person kills a deer for the first time, the shooter gets blood smeared on his face. This is a social ritual, which people say began in the sixteenth century (or maybe earlier), that initiates a person into the hunting ranks by fox hunters.

During the time of the Old Testament, God’s people offered sacrifices to atone for their sin. They offered thousands of animal sacrifices and shed gallons of blood to receive forgiveness. But, as the author of Hebrews says, those sacrifices never removed their guilt and had to be constantly repeated. They sought a perfect sacrifice, but none existed—until Jesus. He had no sin and did what none of those sacrifices could do.

Choosing to follow Jesus means that the benefit of His sacrifice—forgiveness for sin—is now applied to our lives. His sacrifice takes care of our past, present, and future sins. We can live with hope each day, knowing we are no longer under condemnation, but that God has accepted us into His eternal family. Some still try the good-works route to God, but we can never be good enough to earn God’s love. He gives it freely through Christ. If you have not yet accepted His gift, let the blood of Christ cleanse you and give you hope.

Father, thank You for Your Son’s blood that takes away my sin. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Hope of Holiness

By one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10:14).

Scripture: Hebrews 10:11-18

Song: “Holy, Holy, Holy”

I often heard “Practice makes perfect” from my dad while I was growing up. I practiced a lot but never attained perfection. Now, the middle school football team I coached did win every game one year, maybe because of practice five days each week. But not one of those boys was perfect. None had 100 percent averages in all their school subjects, nor were any perfect in their behavior. They were tainted, regardless of their practice.

God’s people were not perfect either. They brought sacrifices without blemish, but the people themselves and the priests who conducted the ceremony were not perfect, although their rituals may have made them look outwardly holy. The people practiced what God commanded but it never made them holy (Hebrews 10:11).

Jesus, however, makes us holy in the Father’s sight. When we choose to follow Christ, God clothes us in Christ’s righteousness, which means we get the holiness He has. Although God sees us this way in position, that doesn’t mean we always act holy in practice. Practicing holiness is essential. God works in our spiritual disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible study, obedience, and fellowship to infuse our minds with His Word that changes us and empowers us for holy living. And we continue these disciplines until we reach Heaven—when God will complete our holiness. So keep practicing!

Father, I ask You to help me practice holiness in my actions, words, and thoughts as You work to make me holy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Be Bold

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings (Hebrews 10:22).

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-22

Song: “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”

As a 9-year-old boy, I witnessed the making of history. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed the Apollo Lunar Module on the moon. Six hours after landing, Armstrong stepped onto the moon’s surface. Nineteen minutes later, Aldrin joined him. Armstrong said of the historic bold move that it was “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Because of Christ’s work on the cross, believers can take such a bold move in approaching our Heavenly Father. No curtain separates our approach as it did in the Old Testament temple, nor must a priest intercede for us. Rather, we can go boldly and directly into God’s presence.

Our sin separates us from God, but Christ dealt with our sin on the cross. Our boldness results from the forgiveness of sin. No matter what our past looks like, Christ wipes the slate clean when we ask. Because God accepts us into His family, He wants us to come often and regularly to fellowship with Him. After all, we are His children, and no parent prevents their child’s approach. God also wants us to go boldly to others with the same love with which He has accepted us. Go courageously before God’s throne and find the grace you need.

Father, as I come boldly before You, help me to confidently take Your love to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Be Patient

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Hebrews 10:36).

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23-36

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

My mom’s father farmed. As he drove the highways around his farmland, he puttered along at 25 miles per hour. Those caught behind him did not appreciate his patience. He also patiently waited each year for his cotton, soybean, and corn seed to sprout—and then for them to bear fruit so he could harvest them. Patience enveloped his life.

Patience was part of being a Christian in the first century, as is evidenced in the words the writer of Hebrews shared with his readers. Giving up to those who persecuted them and giving in to the pagan worship that surrounded them would have been the easy way out. Patiently waiting for God to reward their faithfulness presented the more difficult way.

Patience still characterizes the believer’s life. Across the world, Christians face persecution of various types. We must be patient with those who do not know Christ and with those who do but who are spiritually weak in their faith. As we do good for others, we often must wait to see the fruits of our labor. We engage as we can and wait patiently for God to bring the harvest. Nor does our own spiritual growth happen overnight. We persevere on God’s path and trust Him. Good will win out in the end.

Father, help me to be patient as I do Your will and as I grow in my faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.