

## CHRIST IS HOPE

*At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

EPHESIANS 2:12 (NKJV)

If you were an artist, you couldn't paint a better word picture of how bleak it is to be without Christ. Paul, in these few words to the church of Ephesus, gives a portrait of those he calls "aliens." We usually think of aliens in terms of creatures from a foreign planet, but Paul states this is our condition before knowing Christ. Spiritually, we are from another planet — alienated from God with no hope.

We all know or have known people who are hopeless. Our TV and computer screen, newspapers, and other media portray a world in need of HOPE. Most of the world's leadership — political, social, academic, and military — do not share Paul's belief that the root cause is Christlessness. Christ can make us hopeful; there is hope in Him. Paul would echo the words of the hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand."

Can you remember when you were still an alien? No, not someone who entered our nation illegally, but when you were still without Christ. You may have been like me — raised in the church, active in Sunday school, sang in the choir, a leader of my youth group, confirmed at age 12, christened as an infant — but still an alien. Why? Because it was all about me. That's right, I was in the church but still lost in the world and, in Paul's words, an alien.

*Father, we have no hope in this world except through your Son. Thank you for providing the way for us to come to you. Let our hearts be open to your incredible gift and live as your children and not as aliens without Christ. Amen.*

REV. DAVID L. BAILEY, SR.  
FOUNDER, RANCH HOPE

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## ABUNDANTLY

*Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

JOHN 10:10B (ISV)

**W**ow! Jesus came and He came for us! (Thanks, Lord!) Every day, we ought to be thankful that He gave His life to save ours and to fill our lives abundantly with Himself, His grace, mercy, and love.

That's how my mom lived. It's just been a year since she went to heaven. Mom grew up during the Depression, Dad fought in World War II, they worked hard and long, and they knew the Lord was always with them. The Lord carried Mom through 95 years, which included Dad's death and my brother's death. Mom lived an abundant life. How? Because she knew Jesus as her Savior, Redeemer, Comforter, and Friend. Mom chose to live the life that God gave her in thankfulness to Him. She was the most generous person I know. She was kind, positive, and cheerful. She always saw her life as full, and she knew that her abundance was found solely in the Lord.

Lent is supposed to be a time of reflection, to draw closer to God, and to prepare our hearts for Easter. How do we do that? We spend time talking and listening to Him. We read His Word and ask Him to teach us. We allow the blessing of His indwelling Holy Spirit to lead us. We use all of God's gifts to help us become more like Him. For me, one of those wonderful gifts is my mom. She may be in heaven, but she's still here with me. As I recall how she lived for Him, I'm encouraged to do the same.

Let's agree that we'll keep our eyes on Jesus. In Him is our complete and overflowing abundance of life. He came to Earth! Every day, let's choose to thank Him for the marvelous gift of His salvation and His constant presence in our lives!

*Dearest Lord, thank you so much for coming and offering us abundant lives in you. May all we say, think, feel, and do bring you glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

SUE DIETSCHÉ  
BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

## SURROUNDED BY HIS LOVE

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ... Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

MATTHEW 6:25-27 AND 33-34 (NIV)

In summer 2015, the doctors discovered I had cancer. Through the fall we did chemotherapy, and the body of Christ prayed for me. As winter approached, we counted down to the last treatment and began to prepare for surgery. The body of Christ fed my family. Surgery dates came with numerous setbacks. Through it all, the body of Christ lifted me up with encouragement, generosity, and love. The middle of February approached with still no surgery date. I kept myself busy and consciously made every effort to brush away negative thoughts.

At the same time, I also experienced so many blessings. I was strengthened by the sacrifices of my family and the love of my friends. I was lifted up by a heartfelt prayer time with a small group of coworkers who lovingly shared scripture and prayed for my healing. At the Ash Wednesday service, I was greeted with smiles and hugs. We took communion together. Those kind acts were more effective than any medicine.

One day the next week I had more fasting tests and more blood work. I was instructed to begin a regimen of steroids, which I chose to delay until after the tests. The hematologist called to let me know that “the steroid treatment is working — your platelet count has come up 7 points.” I couldn’t help but laugh, “Well, do I have something to tell you ....” My platelet count had begun to rebound on its own, before I had begun taking the steroids! I wish every moment in my walk was this clearly illustrated.

This has not been easy, but I am grateful to know that God did not give me time to worry or fret. I know I was carried by my church family and their love for Jesus Christ. When Christ rose from the dead, God not only defeated sin but He also laid the foundation for His church. He commissioned us to carry on Christ’s work as the body of Christ. I cannot imagine what last year would have been like without my faithful friends. And I also wonder if we all realize the unbelievable difference each gesture makes when combined with the entire body.

SHARYN PEPE

PITMAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## SEEING WITH YOUR HEART

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

HEBREWS 11:1 (NIV)

While surrounded by a sparse yet lively forest, the young girl let her eyelids slowly close, inviting a peaceful darkness to blanket her world. She stood perfectly still, allowing the music of the trees to fill her, the soft push of the wind to surround her, and the flecks of sunlight to cover her, warming her skin where it touched. All of these things she could feel and hear with her eyes closed. There were other things, too, things that she knew yet could not see. She knew there was earth beneath her, and she knew the sky above her was blue. She knew she had fingers, toes, and freckles — they too hid from her sight. But still, despite her briefly blind state, she lived in complete confidence that the trees, the wind, the sunlight, earth, sky, fingers, toes, and freckles existed and were good.

Living a life of faith can sometimes feel like being in darkness. God is not someone we can physically see, and that often proves to be one of the biggest challenges for believers. With closed eyes, it is difficult to trust the path He is marking for us.

As humans, we have learned to rely on our eyes to tell us what to believe, but God shows His love in other ways.

He may not present Himself directly, but God's love still exists all around us. It resides within souls full of love, within every restored relationship, and along every step of our paths, whether we know it or not. To keep our faith strong, we must learn to see with our hearts instead of our eyes. God's love is like the song of the forest, the rush of the wind, and the warmth of golden sunlight. With our eyes closed, we cannot see it, but it touches us all the same. And it is beautiful.

*God, please restore our faith in you so we may trust what our heart can feel rather than only what our eyes can see.*

RACHAEL KELLEY  
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## HOPE

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11 (NIV)

**H**OPE — We all know the definition of the word. As a noun, it is a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen; a feeling of trust. As a verb, it is to want something to happen or to be the case.

During late winter/early spring as I walk about my yard clearing the winter’s debris, I get so excited albeit a bit worried to see a few spring bulbs forcing their way through the cold ground. I have to rest in the assurance that the Lord is in control of the weather and will protect His flowers. An old wives’ tale says, “It must snow on the crocuses in bloom one last time before winter is truly over.”

Therefore, I find myself full of hope once again. Winter will soon be over, and spring is around the corner. Trusting in the knowledge that God has cared for His Earth over the harsh winter, I also feel His presence in my life. I am grateful that He has protected and provided for me and my family (especially when my daughter’s heater repeatedly broke down). He answers all our prayers in His way, in His time. We need to have hope and trust in Him with all our heart and soul.

*Thank you, Heavenly Father, for Jeremiah 29:11 where you promise to provide what I need, when I need it, and for giving me hope in your Son Jesus, in whose name I pray. Amen.*

KATHY CHANDO  
ZION COMMUNITY CHURCH



We are not made for the mountains, for sunrises, or for the other beautiful attractions in life — those are simply intended to be moments of inspiration. We are made for the valley and the ordinary things of life and that is where we have to prove our stamina and strength.

*Oswald Chambers*

## SELF-EVALUATION

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 2: 3-5 (NIV)

If your Bible looks anything like mine, there are often papers folded and stashed between the pages and cover. My friend calls this her “biblido.” There is one thing I have carried around for years that I frequently read, and it convicts me each time. It was written in 1733 by John Wesley and is called the “Test for Self-Evaluation.” Although some questions may be slightly rephrased, they are as follows:

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I’m a better person than I really am? Do I laugh at the mistakes of others, reveling in their errors and misfortunes? Do I insist on having my own way? Is there a tendency for me to put others down so that I’ll be thought of more highly? Do I pass on to others what is told to me in confidence? Am I thoughtful in expressing thanks to people for what they’ve done for me, no matter how insignificant it seems? Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Did the Bible live in me yesterday? Did I disobey God in anything yesterday? Did I insist on doing something about which my conscience was uneasy? Did I handle discouragement well or did I have to be coddled? Am I enjoying prayer? When did I last speak to someone about Christ? Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, or hold resentment toward? If so, what am I doing about it? Is Christ real in me?

John Wesley encouraged his followers to read this daily. Wow! This is a high standard to live your life by, but it is something that we can all meditate on and act upon. I want no gaps between how I walk and how I talk. During this season of Lent, it’s worth our attention and action.

*Dear Jesus, help me to live as an authentic representative of you. Help me to use my mouth and the way I live to glorify you. Thank you for these words and your scriptures to help us. In your name, Amen.*

LINDA SIZEMORE  
EVANGELICAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## SHINE, JESUS, SHINE!

*“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

JOHN 8:12 (NIV)

**I**t was not God’s plan that the darkness of evil would be in this world. Man’s rebellion brought that. So in the heavens God made His redemption plan. He sent Jesus to be the Light of the world to overcome darkness. From Calvary’s hill to an empty tomb, a victory was won that Jesus said was coming! “Take heart, I have overcome the world!” (John 16:33) “I am the Light of the world!”

Many stories in the Bible show simple people in acts of faith. Though they were in the darkness, they had enough hope and faith to keep walking toward the Light, and Jesus was there to give them hope and new life.

One of my favorite faith stories is the woman who had bled for 12 years (Mark 5:25-34 and Matthew 9:20-22). She had lived in painful darkness as a social outcast, helpless, lonely, considered unclean. Shame was her identity. The world had failed her, but she had faith and courage to reach out to the Light of the world! When she heard He was coming, she said to herself, “If only I touch His cloak, I will be healed.” The crowd was tight, but she reached and touched the hem of His cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped!

Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around and asked, “Who touched me?” Everyone was looking around. What does He mean? “Lots of people are touching Him,” they said. Jesus waited. Realizing she must come forward, she fell trembling at His feet. Jesus gently said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

This woman had faith that was sure of what it hoped for and certain of what it could not see (Hebrews 11:1). She had one goal: reach Jesus. Her eyes were fixed on Him.

By faith she reached out for the impossible and found Jesus in all His glory and power. He is the same today! He’s resurrected and powerful! Shine, Jesus, shine!

*Precious Lord, Light of my life, hear my prayer and hold me tight through each night. Take my life and let it be a shining beacon, beaming glory that others, too, might see your light. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

BARBARA MOIST  
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH