

YOUTH UNIT II: Expressing Hope
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Expectant Watchfulness
YOUTH TOPIC: God Loves Us as We Are

LESSON 9
DATE: July 28, 2024

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 130
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

HOLY BIBLE

“We Shall Overcome” – “We Shall Overcome” is one of the most iconic songs associated with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Often, the lyrics of the song were sung as civil rights protestors were marching for civil rights. Can’t you hear the lyrics being sung, “We shall overcome ... We’ll walk hand in hand ... We shall all be free ... We shall live in Peace ... The Lord will see us through ... Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe we shall overcome someday!”

Imagine a crowd of 300,000 singing “We Shall Overcome.” In 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, folk singer Joan Baez led a large crowd of 300,000 singing what some say was the unofficial anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. The scene was the March on Washington. Can you see the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on which protestors and speakers stood?

The lyrics to “We Shall Overcome” have been sung and used any number of times. Famed gospel artist Mahalia Jackson sang her version of the song, as did Pete Seeger. Even U.S. President Lydon B. Johnson used the title of the song in a speech that he gave to the U.S. Congress in March 1965. Then President Johnson used the song in a speech he gave in the wake of civil rights protestors being violently attacked during the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

“We Shall Overcome” is a hopeful song. The arc of the song’s lyric lend themselves to an understanding that those who are oppressed, especially Black people, are God’s people who God will vindicate in the end. Ultimately, “we shall overcome.” As we march toward bringing about God’s plan for us as a people, “we’ll walk hand in hand.” While it is hard to see in the midst of the violent acts being perpetrated against us, we have hope that “we shall be free” one day. (Martin Luther King once said, “ Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”) And so, those (s)heroes of the Civil Rights

Movement marched even though they could not see the freedom and peace for which they were marching. Ultimately, the song ends with the belief that “the Lord will see us through.” This is a deeply held belief in the heart of the singer and the protester. “I do believe we shall overcome someday!”

Do you believe that Black people have overcome? Certainly, Black people have overcome a lot. But there is more to overcome, isn't there? Do you believe that those things that still need to be overcome will be “someday?” Are you working/marching toward the freedom and peace that Black people have been seeking, which is for the world to recognize that Black people were created in the image of God, and that God loves us as we are?



KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- Do you think you would have participated in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement? In what way? Please discuss.
- Do you believe that there are injustices that need to be addressed in our world today? If so, what are they? Is marching still an effective way to address injustices, why or why not? What are some new ways to “march” toward justice in God's world?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

KEY VERSE: O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. Psalm 130:7.

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. ² Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! ³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Today, we complete our unit focused on “expressing hope.” We do so learning about Psalm 130, which is part of a group of psalms known as “songs of ascents.” Those psalms are Psalms 120-134. But why are they called songs of ascent?

The fifteen psalms that make up the songs of ascent were used by Jews who traveled from outside of Jerusalem to Jerusalem, where the Temple is located, to celebrate one of the Jewish high holy days. The belief is that they would sing these songs as they journeyed, walked, marched, even, toward the Temple. “Each psalm is relatively short (except Psalm 132) and thus capable of being memorized, and a variety of types and themes is represented.” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. IV, 1176) What is most interesting is that the reason they are called songs of “ascent” is because the Hebrew word means “to go up,” which can also be translated as “steps” or “stairs.” So, the belief is that Jews would sing these songs as they journeyed to Jerusalem and as they ascended the stairs/steps of the Temple. Psalms 120-134 are marching psalms.

Psalm 130 is associated with Psalm 129, which immediately precedes it. Taken together, these two psalms are read as saying that even though we suffer for God at the hands of those who want to oppress us, we cannot be self-righteous, we must be aware of our own sin. In other words, we should never forget that we all sin and should not blame everything on our haters, even when they are hatin’ on us because we are God’s children.

The title associated with Psalm 130 is “Out of the Depths.” It is the inspiration for the hymn “Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee,” which is a direct quotation of verse 1. The “depths” (v. 1) are a common metaphor in psalms to indicate the spiritual affliction suffered by the speaker. The writer of this psalm feels separated from God because of their own sin. (v. 3, 8). Do you think that the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement could have related to Psalm 130? They had to feel, at times, that God was not with them as they opposed those evil people and forces opposed to civil rights for Black people. Their despair was probably deep and profound at times. And it would have been easy for them to focus only on the sin of their oppressors. But Psalm 130 would have reminded them to seek forgiveness from God for their own sin. (v. 4)

There is a hopeful shift in verse five and following in Psalm 130 as the psalm writer waits on the Lord. They find hope in the word (v. 5). They find hope in the Lord (v. 7). In the face of the human failings, there is a recognition of God’s for-

givenness, love, and mercy. God is not only about judgment, but about showing mercy. And so, God's mercy is the psalmist's source of hope. At the end of the day, God's forgiveness turns a song that began as a lament (a cry to God) into a song of praise that was sung on the steps of the Temple. This is similar to the way that "we shall overcome" transforms into "the Lord will see us through," as it was sung on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

"Onward and upward" is a phrase that has been used in a number of contexts. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the phrase as meaning "toward a better condition or higher level." It is unclear who first used the phrase.

One person who used the phrase "onward and upward" is Mary Church Terrell. She was an American civil rights journalist, teacher, and one of the first Black women to earn a college degree, having earned her bachelor's degree in 1884, as well as a master's degree in 1888, both from Oberlin College. Writing about a hope for justice, Terrell wrote:

And so, lifting as we climb, **onward and upward** we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage, born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of the responsibility which we shall continue to assume, we look forward to a future large with promise and hope. Seeking no favors because of our color, nor patronage because of our needs, we knock at the bar of justice, asking an equal chance."

Do you have an "onward and upward" mentality? Are you marching toward justice, and doing so in the name of the Lord? Hope for progress ultimately is found in the Lord.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ☐ There is a paradox of simultaneously feeling confident in the Lord's promises and distant from God's presence. Write a poem, rap, or song about this tension.
- ☐ The psalm writer mentions "waiting" in hope. Journal about things for which you have waited recently. What is hard about waiting? Does anything about the process bring joy or hope? What are we waiting for as Christians? How does this inform your everyday life?