

“Thanks for Giving Us Hope”

Romans 15:13

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Communion Devotion

His friends call him J-Mac, and after February 15, 2006, he has a lot more friends. This was the night that basketball team manager Jason McElwain was inserted into a high school game to play the final four minutes. He had never played because he is autistic, the fastest growing disability in the country. Autism is growing at the alarming rate of ten to seventeen percent a year.

Soon after J-Mac started playing, he took a shot. It did not even draw iron, falling far short of the goal. He did not quit shooting, though. He knew he could do better because he had spent hours in the gym practicing. What followed was nothing short of a miracle. In his first ever appearance in a high school game, J-Mac scored twenty points and set a school record with six three-pointers. The student body stormed the floor when the game was over and carried J-Mac off the floor on their shoulders.

Last Sunday evening, J-Mac was awarded an ESPN award for the Best Moment in Sports in 2005-06. He beat out Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant's eighty-one point game last season, George Mason University's NCAA Final Four run and thirteen-year-old Dakoda Dowd's LPGA appearance for her mother, who has terminal bone cancer.

Because of the national exposure J-Mac has received in the last few months, many from around the country have contacted him. Of particular importance to him was a letter written by a teenage girl whose younger brother is autistic. She closed the letter with the words, **“Thanks for giving us hope.”**

As we humbly gather around this sacred table today, which reminds us of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we borrow this young girl's words and say, **“Thanks for giving us hope.”**

Thanks for showing us that we can know God personally and respond to His call upon our lives to make the world better.

Thanks for showing us that one person can make a difference in a world fighting for survival.

Thanks for showing us that we can respond to our enemies with love rather than hate and goodwill rather than revenge.

Thanks for showing us that good can overcome evil.

Thanks for showing us that it is best to live by the Golden Rule.

Thanks for showing us that God will have the final word in our lives, not death and destruction, and it will be good.

Thanks for showing us that “all things do work together for good for those that love God and are faithful to Him.”

Thanks for reminding us that there is no situation, good or bad that God cannot embrace and change for the better.

Thanks for showing us that it is possible to be faithful to God and our mission in the midst of great challenges, temptations and adversity.

Thanks for showing us that it is possible to dream noble and lofty dreams and achieve them.

Thanks for teaching us about God, life and ourselves and having the confidence to believe we can learn and grow.

Thanks for encouraging us to confront our sins and shortcomings so that with God's help we can make necessary changes.

Thanks for letting us know we can be forgiven and released from guilt and shame.

Thanks for liberating us from smothering legalism that stifles creativity.

Thanks for giving us a loving image of God that encourages intimacy and dialogue.

Thanks for showing us that we can usher in "peace on earth goodwill toward men" through the pursuit of justice.

Thanks for showing us how to die with faith, hope and love so that we can "walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil."

Thanks for letting us know that we can be an inspiration to those that are struggling with doubts, limitations, grief, depression and shame.

Thanks for giving us hope!

Our world is desperately in need of hope these days. There is such a strong feeling of unrest and despair everywhere. How easy it would be to drift into cynicism and live in fear. Where and in whom can we find hope? Listen to Paul's words recorded in Romans 15:13.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

I invite you to place your faith in a gracious God that Paul identified as the source of hope. Through Christ our Lord He has provided the inspiration and example we need for arranging our values and priorities, relating to others, handling problems, challenges and temptations. Let him inspire you and bring the best out in you. When he does, don't be surprised if you receive a note one day from someone that needs a role model that says, "**Thanks for giving me hope!**"