

## Hopelessness and Hope

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*Shameka Ferrell is a 2014-15 NBA XPLOR Resident in Hiram-Mantua, OH. She shares this reflection from her experience at the 2015 Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.*



I attended the 2015 Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) in D.C. for the first time; there were many emotions and thoughts that hit me all at once. Throughout the sessions and speakers, so many feelings hit me in waves, but one feeling that really stood out to me was hopelessness. Many may see this term as the loss of hope, but I see it as a means to reality. If one is hopeless and does not set expectations at an unrealistic level (when it comes to mankind), then the level of disappointment is lessened or eliminated.

One statement that really struck me was, “My complexion is a reflection of my reality.” I think this is one of those profound truths that hit the nail right on the head. Most experiences in life, when related to my complexion, have been dark and unforgiving—and growing up in a society where the lighter you are the prettier, even other people of color look down on you. My time at EAD spoke to how long and draining this ‘fight’ is and how slow the results come. In my 23 years and three months of living, I’ve witnessed about half of the men in my family and community be incarcerated and plucked out of the everyday life of society. It is time to stop denying the racial issues; it’s time to promote and encourage just actions and value on all lives—but how do you do that when your life isn’t being valued?

A striking moment from EAD was when one of the speakers was talking about a 23-year-old African-American male in Ferguson who asked, “Why has God abandoned us? Why do they fear me? Where is their heart? Who is their God? I do not want to raise my seed in this country.” It frightens me to know that, as a woman of color, this is what our men of color must face. I am saddened that my dreams of being a mother are threatened by the fears that, if I had a son, he could one day be shot down in the streets.

In my day-to-day work and service, I constantly ask myself: Why am I here? What is the purpose of my presence? Am I really making an impact? In continuing on my life journey, I will ask myself: How will I break down these systemic walls around me? How will I go against the fears and insecurities I was taught? What am I changing? What am I building?

(over)



In conclusion, I see that even when it seems religion will fail me, at the end of the day, my faith and belief in God is all I have left. My faith in Him keeps me going; my hope that I will be proven wrong and my three younger brothers will live to a ripe old age. That Dr. King's dream will actually come true—not just a half-painted picture we are forced to accept and settle for.

*The NBA XPLOR Project is a ten-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve.*

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