

General Conference of the  
Seventh-Day Adventist Church  
WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION



# IMPACT WEEK *Of* PRAYER

April **10**<sup>th</sup> - **17**<sup>th</sup> 2021



*If there was ever a time we need hope; it is now!*

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**IMPACT WEEK OF PRAYER**

**APRIL 10-17, 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

You are welcome to annual **IMPACT WEEK OF PRAYER**. This week is also for preparation towards World Church Impact Day coming up on **April 17, 2021**. The rationale for this is that you need to receive the blessings in this material first before sharing with others because you cannot give what you do not have. The taste of the pudding is in the eating. All hands should be on deck. All departments of the church are to use this week for in-reach and out-reach. Speakers are to be carefully and specially selected. Let us revive our hope in Christ and His second coming once again.

**PREFACE**

Recently our world has gone through a devastating pandemic. Although some countries were hit much harder than others, the entire world has been impacted. Millions have been infected. Hundreds of thousands have died. The global economy has been severely disrupted, and we are just beginning to recover. In a sense COVID-19 has touched us all, but the coronavirus is not the only tragedy that our world is facing in the twenty-first century. There are a number of significant challenges we are facing personally and as a global community.

Unemployment, poverty, natural disasters, cancer, heart disease, rising crime, increased violence, war, and famine are affecting millions. These world conditions lead us to ask a series of questions: Where is God in all of this? Is God responsible for the catastrophes in our world? Are we living at the time of the end? Are these climactic events predicted in prophecy? How can we live purposeful, joyous lives in the light of everything going on in our world? The Bible provides answers to these and many other questions. At the end of this week of prayer, you would have explored God's answers to our deepest questions as we go through the extracts from the book, *Hope for Troubled Times*. (Mark Finley).

**METHODOLOGY**

We are suggesting that you use various methods for conducting this week of prayer in order to accommodate all classes of church members and special guests.

1. Traditional method—all members come together in their local church.
2. Small Group—Action Unit, or House Fellowship.
3. Office Group—Two or more members within office proximity.
4. Business Group—Two or more members within business proximity.
5. WhatsApp/Face Book Group—Some church members can connect through WhatsApp/Face Book/Phone to conduct the week of prayer. Share your daily reading experience with someone who you are committed/responsible to.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Reserve some minutes for group discussion on suggested questions following the reading or any related question in line with the topic of the day.

## **SUGGESTED OBJECTIVES OF EACH GROUP LEADER**

1. Each group member gets the material—hard or soft copy.
2. Each group member reads the material.
3. Share testimonies and prayer requests.
4. Pray for one another and pray for requests from other sources.
5. Encourage each member to donate books for distribution during impact day.
6. Encourage each member to participate in the mass distribution of Missionary Book on the IMPACT Day.
7. Encourage members to continue to share Missionary Book to their friends, neighbors, work mates e.t.c. after IMPACT Day.
8. Write reports and inspiring testimonies about the week of prayer and IMPACT Day.
9. Encourage each group member to participate in the exercises.
10. Discuss how best to improve on the prayer program and Missionary Book distribution.
11. Encourage each participant to be personally prepared and ready for Christ's second coming.

## **NOTE**

Each group leader is encouraged to read the entire book *Hope for the Troubled Times*, from where the week of prayer reading was extracted. This will give him/her deeper insight and additional information to share with the group.

## **PRAYER**

Church leaders are praying for you that this week of prayer will bring abundant blessings to all families. There are suggested prayer requests for each day. Solicit for prayers from group members. May God heal our land from the impact of COVID-19 and other distressing conditions.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

Missionary Book distribution will be both hard and soft copy henceforth. Kindly note that all copies shared should be reported through a denominational channel, whether soft or hard copy.<sup>[L]  
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## CHAPTER 1

### PANDEMICS, PESTILENCES, AND PROPHECY

Our world has experienced and it is still experiencing pandemics. We cannot live our lives as we use to do as a result of the Coronavirus. Normally viruses adopt to particular weather, temperature and conditions but this virus cuts across all weather, temperature and conditions. Thank God, researchers say they have found vaccine to combat the Virus. During the height of the virus international borders were closed and almost everything could not operate normally. Schools suspended classes. Movie theaters, amusement parks, and other entertainment venues shut their doors. Sporting events and large conventions were canceled. People were told to avoid gatherings of more than 10 individuals. “Social distancing” became a common theme in the news media. There were lockdowns. In some countries the medical system became overwhelmed and unemployment rates skyrocketed. As a result, people began to ask themselves questions in their minds.

#### Answering the Tough Questions

Where are you God, in all this? Is COVID-19 a judgment of God, or is it just some random, out-of-control virus? What does the Bible say about pestilences or pandemics? Is this a sign of the end of the world? Is there hope in this world? Hope for our personal lives, our families, our children, and our world? Let me assure you, God is not the author of sickness. He is not the originator of suffering or disease. In the first chapter of the Bible, at the end of Creation week, God looked out over the world and declared that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God created a perfect world without one taint of disease. There were no viruses, germs, or bacteria. There was no suffering or death. Sickness was not part of His original plan. His plan was for earth to be populated with people who were happy, healthy, and holy. Before Sin entered into our world, God created a perfect man, a perfect woman, a perfect home and a perfected environment. Everything was perfect but when sin entered into our world, it affected negatively everything God had created and fought against God principles on earth. Lucifer deceived Adam and Eve, just as he deceived one third of the angels in heaven. The Bible calls the devil “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44, NIV). The book of Revelation, describes him as the one who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). Satan’s first lie was that God did not mean what He said. Eve could partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and would not “surely die,” as God had declared (Genesis 3:4). She could violate God’s commands without any serious consequences. The evil one deceived her into thinking that by eating of the tree she would enter a higher sphere of existence. Satan claimed that God was arbitrary, an authoritarian tyrant who did not have the best interest of His creatures in view. When Adam and Eve sinned, the gates of suffering and sickness were opened. Separated from God, we are separated from the ultimate source of life.

Sin is essentially separation from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Separated from God, we are separated from the source of health. We live in a broken world, a world in rebellion against God. The reason Christ came was to satisfy the claims of the broken law, to restore us back to God’s image, and to reveal what God is like. The Bible says in Luke 19:10 that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (NIV). Because when we sinned, we are supposed to die for the wages of sin is death and we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. In His life and death, Jesus revealed how much the Father cares for us. Every miracle in the New Testament that Jesus performed speaks to us of a God who cares when we suffer. All the miracles He performed was a demonstration of how much He genuinely loves us. The

death of Jesus demolished Satan's lie forever and revealed that He would rather take the guilt, shame, and condemnation of sin upon Himself than have one of us lost (2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13). Not only that, Jesus also came to be an example, to model the abundant life. Jesus demonstrated that God is not the one behind our suffering and diseases. He is the God of the abundant life! In the great controversy between good and evil, Satan did rebel against God and is battling against God for the control of this planet. Suffering and diseases are the result of this controversy. Satan uses them to discredit God. He deceives millions into thinking God does not have our best interest in view. In this world of suffering, God has revealed His love and care.

### **What About Pestilences in the Bible?**

The Bible uses the word "pestilence," or a variation of that word, 81 different times in the New King James Version. A pestilence is a sudden or fatal epidemic that generally impacts an entire community. The word "pestilence" is used at least three different ways in Scripture. Sometimes in the Bible the word "pestilence" is used to describe a disease that occurs because we are in a world of sin. Take, for example, the story of Job. Did Job's sin cause the pestilences that afflicted his body from head to toe? Was he responsible for the impact of the destruction upon his livestock, his family, his home, and his community? Certainly not! Satan was the mastermind behind all his suffering and disease, a disease that occurs because we are in a world of sin. Take, for example, the story of Job. Did Job's sin cause the pestilences that afflicted his body from head to toe? Was he responsible for the impact of the destruction upon his livestock, his family, his home, and his community? Certainly not! Satan was the mastermind behind all his suffering and disease. If that is the case, why should God ever allow Satan to afflict Job with such a horrible plague or pestilence? We live in a world separated from God's original plan of complete health and wholeness. God does not always intervene to prevent Satan's attacks, but through it all He is with us. He is there to strengthen, encourage, and support us. It is often through life's toughest times that we seek God most earnestly and long for heaven more deeply.

The second way the word "pestilence" is used in the Bible. Sometimes pestilences are the judgments of God upon the wicked. The Old Testament prophets describe pestilences as God's means of leading His rebellious people to repentance. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the word 25 times in harmony with God's judgments. You may say that's rather strange, but think about Egypt. Were the plagues of ancient Egypt simply natural disasters, or were they God's judgments to deliver His people? In love God sent warning after warning to the Egyptians. He graciously sent repeated messages to them to avoid the disaster that was coming, but they willfully refused His loving invitations, and the judgments of God fell upon the land.

The third use of the word "pestilence." God simply withdraws His protective power. There are times God withdraws His presence and allows the natural result of sin to take place. Do you remember the story of Israel being bitten by snakes in the wilderness? Many died of the venom. God simply withdrew His presence to allow the consequence of their sinful choices to be played out so they would turn in repentance to His will. When we see pestilences raging in our land, it may be God's clarion call for us to become more serious about our commitment to Christ, experience a deeper repentance, and surrender our lives fully to Him. In the prophetic language of the Bible, wind represents destruction. Think of the destructive force of a tornado or a hurricane. The famines, earthquakes, fires, floods, and pestilences we see all around us are a foretaste of what is coming. The angels are restraining the full force of destruction while the Holy Spirit powerfully appeals to people everywhere to make a full commitment to Jesus. God is preparing His people for the final crisis that is soon to break upon this

world. Jesus appeals to us to make a total, absolute commitment to Him, to be anchored in His Word, and to be filled with His love so that all the demons in hell with their devilish schemes cannot move us.

## **OPENING A DOOR GOD WANTED FOREVER SHUT**

When Adam and Eve sinned, they opened a door of sickness, suffering, and disease that God wanted forever shut. Sin is essentially separation from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). Separated from God, we are separated from the ultimate source of life. Separated from God, we are separated from the source of health. We live in a broken world, a world in rebellion against God. The reason Christ came was to satisfy the claims of the broken law, to restore us back to God's image, and to reveal what God is like. The Bible says in Luke 19:10 that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (NIV). In His life and death, Jesus revealed how much the Father cares for us. Every miracle in the New Testament that Jesus performed speaks to us of a God who loves and cares when we suffer. By His death on the cross, He demolished Satan's lie forever and revealed that He would rather take the guilt, shame, and condemnation of sin upon Himself than have one of us lost (see 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13). Jesus came also to be an example, to model the abundant life. Jesus demonstrated that God is not the one behind sickness; He's not the one behind suffering, however, Satan uses sickness, suffering, and disease to discredit God. He deceives millions into thinking God does not have our best interest in view. In this world of suffering, God has revealed His love and care. He says, "*Lo*, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20, KJV).

## **Rising Natural Disasters**

Jesus describes natural disasters, including pestilences, that devastate the earth in the context of the signs of His second coming. Let me hasten to add that we need to avoid two extremes. One extreme is the fanaticism that shouts, "The coronavirus is here, so Jesus must be coming next week [or next month or next year]." There are some people who are consumed with fanciful, sensational time-setting theories not found in the Bible. The other extreme is to dismiss this virus as some natural phenomenon that will soon pass, that has absolutely nothing at all to do with last-day signs. But that's certainly not what Jesus said, in Matthew 24 Jesus discusses end-time signs and declares, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:7, 8). Luke also spoke about the signs of the end times. Jesus predicted that there would be dramatic signs in the natural world that would be a sign of His return.

It might seem strange to talk about famines today in a world in which so many people are obese, but it is a fact that millions starve to death every year. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that nearly 870 million people are suffering from chronic undernourishment. That represents one of eight people living on the planet, or about 13 percent of the world's population. Every day more than 20,000 people die from the effects of malnutrition. That is almost 7.5 million people every year. Jesus said there would be famines, earthquakes, and pestilences. Meanwhile, tsunamis, mudslides, avalanches, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions have been breaking all previous records for their violence and disastrous effects. More than \$24 billion of weather damage is caused each year. It is as if all nature is speaking, saying, "Lord, it's time for You to come and deliver us." The 2004 Sumatra

Andaman earthquake and the Indonesian tsunami that followed had waves almost 100 feet high and took more than 225,000 lives, with thousands more injured. In the earthquake that struck the Sichuan province of China on May 12, 2008, almost 70,000 people died and another 18,000 were listed as missing. On January 12, 2010, Haiti was struck by a major quake. Haiti government figures show that at least 220,000 people died and more than 3 million were struck. Earthquakes have been prevalent in the past 50 years. Jesus also predicted the rise of pestilences. Pestilences are epidemics that impact entire countries. Pestilences can also be categorized as strange diseases that destroy our crops; pollutants that impact the environment; or noxious substances that contaminate our air and water. We are seeing another form of pestilence in the new diseases that is springing up around the world and before science can find a solution or a vaccine for, another appears. Just think about the pestilences that have taken millions of lives in recent years.

### **A Sign of Christ's Return?**

Does that mean that this COVID-19 virus is a sign of Christ's coming? It does not stand alone as the sign. But when you look at the larger picture, pestilences are one of multiple signs that Jesus predicts will occur preliminary to His return. These events indicate that, time is running out and that Jesus will soon come. We have just but a limited time.

### **Hope Makes a Difference**

When we lose hope, dark clouds of despair hang over our heads and the future appears gloomy, and everything about tomorrow seems uncertain. But hope leads us from what is, to what can be. It paints tomorrow in an array of bright colors. It lifts our spirits from the mud below to the heavens above. Hope is not some idle wish or vague longing for a better future. It is not baseless desire or an uncertain expectation with no real certainty or assurance. In the ancient Scriptures hope is a strong, confident expectation based on the unchangeable promises of God with the certainty that the thing you hope for will be accomplished. The apostle Paul, writing in the Bible book of Romans, states that the "things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4, KJV).

We live in a broken world. Sickness, suffering, poverty, and disease afflict both the righteous and the unrighteous, but here is the difference: Those who put their faith in God are filled with hope. Our hope is anchored in a God who will never let us down (Hebrews 6:18). It is rooted in a God who is there in our trials, with us in our difficulties. He identifies with us in our tears and comforts our hearts. He came to provide us with the hope of a better tomorrow. Today let your heart be filled with hope. One day soon Jesus will come, and the heartaches and trials, the challenges and difficulties of life, will be over, and we will live with Him forever.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Do you think God has withdrawn His protection from us for natural consequences of sin to take its course and that is why we are experiencing this coronavirus?
2. What are the lessons learnt from this situation and how have they affected your life positively?
3. Have you lost hope or your level of uncertainty has rather gone up?

### **Prayer Points**

1. God should stop the negative effect of Covid-19
2. God should heal all those who have been infested by Covid-19



3. God should protect those who have not been infested by Covid-19 from been infested
4. God should provide jobs to those who have lost their jobs as result of Covid-19

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **OVERCOMING FEAR, WORRY, AND ANXIETY**

Someone has said that fear, worry, and anxiety are our greatest enemies. “According to an ancient legend, a peasant man driving one day to Constantinople was stopped by an old woman, who asked him for a ride. He took her up beside him, and as they drove along, he looked at her, became frightened, and asked, ‘Who are you?’ “The old woman replied, ‘I am Cholera.’ “Frightened, the peasant ordered the old woman to get down and walk, but she persuaded him to take her along, upon her promise that she would not kill more than five people in Constantinople. As a pledge of the promise she handed him a dagger, saying to him that it was the only weapon with which she could be killed. Then she added: I shall meet you in two days. If I break my promise, you may stab me.’

“In Constantinople 120 people died of the cholera. The enraged man who had driven her to the city searched for her. When he found her, he raised the dagger that she had given him to kill her. He shouted, ‘You promised that you would not kill more than five people, and 120 died.’ “But she stopped him, saying: ‘I have kept my agreement. I killed only five. Fear killed the others.’

“This legend is a true parable of life.” Disease may kill thousands of people, but thousands more die because they are overwhelmed by fear. When we look to the future with fear, expecting the worst rather than with confidence expecting the best, we become crippled with anxiety and paralyzed with worry. From the time we are born until the day we die, fear often casts its dark shadow on our lives.

Fear strangles our joy and destroys our dreams. Fear is a strong emotion closely related to anxiety and worry. It often occurs as the result of some threat, situation, or danger that is apparently unavoidable. One thing we learned from COVID-19 is how suddenly a pandemic can strike fear in the heart of an entire nation. People became fearful that each person they met might be carrying the coronavirus and infect them. Each cough created anxiety that they might have the virus. Every time they sneezed, their hearts beat faster. They continually asked themselves, “Do I have the virus? And if I do, is it my death sentence?” Dealing with Fear What can deliver us from our worst fears, or it might be more accurate to say who can deliver us from those fears?

The sense of the presence of God is the antidote to fear. We were created to live by faith, not be consumed by our fears. E. Stanley Jones, a popular twentieth-century preacher, once said, “I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt, and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath—these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely—these are my native air.” We were created to live a life of trust in the One who made us. Look beyond your fears to the Christ, who cares for you more than you will ever know. We have the assurance of the One who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). One of the great Bible stories on overcoming fear takes place in an often-forgotten story tucked away in the Bible’s Old Testament. The king of Syria had surrounded the Israelite city of Dothan. The king’s intent was to capture Elisha. Every time the King of Syria had made a battle move, the prophet Elisha had warned the captain of Israel’s armies. The Syrian king was furious. The only way he could win the battle was to capture and kill Elisha. He brought all the forces in his mighty army to surround the city so that escape was impossible. When Elisha’s servant woke early in the morning and saw the city surrounded by the enemy armies with hundreds of horses and chariots, he was seized with fear. Worry filled his heart. Death seemed inevitable. Trembling with terror, he came to Elisha. He was so



worried that it was difficult for him to speak, but finally the words came out: “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” (2 Kings 6:15). Elisha’s answer is classic. It provides a life-changing principle for all those who are gripped by fear. It gives comfort to those who are consumed by worry and anxiety. Elisha simply stated, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (verse 17). Despite an almost impossible situation, God was still in control. He was still on His throne. He had a solution where there appeared to be no solution. He could make a way where there seemed to be no way.

Elisha prayed that his young servant would see—the angelic armies of heaven surrounding them, protecting them, and eventually delivering them. Miraculously God struck the Syrian armies with blindness, and Elisha and his servant escaped. God has a thousand ways to deliver us from our worst fears. If our eyes are focused on the problem, fear will overcome us. If our eyes are fixed upon Jesus, the emotion of fear may still be present, but it will not cripple us. Fear will no longer dominate our lives. The answer to crippling fear is not that we will never be afraid— it is rather that we have One with us in our fears, strengthening us to go on no matter how we feel. We have One who is larger than our fears, bigger than our worries, and greater than our anxieties by our side, and He has practical, down-to-earth, real solutions to our problems. The sense of the presence of God is the antidote to fear. We were created to live by faith, not be consumed by our fears. E. Stanley Jones, a popular twentieth-century preacher, once said, “I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt, and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath—these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely—these are my native air.” We were created to live a life of trust in the One who made us. Look beyond your fears to the Christ, who cares for you more than you will ever know. Faith Versus Fear There is another fear breaker found in a story on the stormy sea of Galilee that teaches us the importance of faith, not fear.

### **How can we overcome our fears?**

The ancient Scriptures are filled with more than 3,000 promises of God’s love and care. Many of the Bible’s promises are specifically encouraging in times of crisis. Clinging to the promises of God, we are filled with hope when we face catastrophes. We confront them with confidence in Christ, who stands by our side. We have the assurance of the One who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). In the storms of life that we face daily, Jesus is preparing us for greater crises that will break upon our world in the future. The disciples saw the storm; Jesus saw them. Their eyes were fixed upon the waves; Jesus’ eyes were fixed upon them. To the disciples everything seemed out of control, but Jesus was still in control. Amid the storms of life His eyes are upon us. When the thunder roars and the waves are high, He is still mighty to save.

In Mathew 14:25-26, the scripture says, “Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.” The Greek word for “fear” translated in verse 26 is an extremely strong word. It can be better translated “terrified.” Here is the problem. The disciples feared what they did not know. They saw what they thought was a ghost. Belief in evil spirits was common in first-century Palestine. The idea of ghosts, goblins, and phantoms was widespread. These disciples had spent years with Jesus, but in a time of storm their fears overtook their rational thinking processes. The unknown often creates fear, and the problem is that sometimes our worst fears come true. As we enter trying experiences, as fears arise, as anxiety threatens our joy, we can have absolute confidence in Christ. He is the one in charge, and He knows what He is doing. The answer to the fears in our life is faith—

faith that Jesus is there in the storms of life and will take us through any situation and get us out the other side. Fear is an emotion. Faith is an attitude, and focus is a choice. We can have absolute confidence that Jesus never turns away from those who cry out in faith. His arm is strong to hold us up. David describes this beautifully in the Psalms: “Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed . . . with the saving strength of His right hand” (Psalm 20:6). We are safe in the hands of Jesus. If we would believe more, we would doubt less. The work of faith is to resolve our doubts, so we place our confidence in Christ and Christ alone.

Why don't we need to fear? The reason we are not afraid is not that we believe we will never get sick. We are free from paralyzing fear because we believe that whatever state we find ourselves in, Christ will be with us. You remember that Job experienced a terrible pestilence that horribly afflicted his body. During his suffering he cried out in confidence, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25). God has a purpose in permitting these calamities to occur. He is calling us to totally, completely depend upon Him. He is revealing to us that there is no certainty in the world we live in. Christ is our assurance. He is our security. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Deliverer, our coming King. Jesus is the answer to the overwhelming fears that consume our energy, rob our joy, and ruin our health. Fear must give way to faith as we adjust our focus. Fear is an emotion. We cannot necessarily control our emotions. Emotions come and go. They often suddenly sweep over us. Faith is an attitude. Faith is trust in God as a well-known friend, believing that He loves us and will never do us any harm.

A Personal Illustration: Let me give you a very personal illustration of trust. It was necessary for me to get some medical treatments for a particular condition I am facing. One of the treatments my medical team recommended was hyperbaric oxygen. This necessitated being placed in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber for about two hours per day for 35 to 40 treatments. When the owner of the clinic explained the treatment to me, he said the problem many people have going into this chamber is not claustrophobia; it is trust. After you are placed in the chamber, there is no way you can get out alone. You must have absolute confidence that the chamber operator will get you out when your treatment is over. If you trust the operator, you will be fine. When I entered that hyperbaric oxygen chamber, I placed my trust in the medical technician. I had no fear, because I had confidence in the one who was operating the machine. I believed the one in charge knew what he was doing. As we enter trying experiences, as fears arise, as anxiety threatens our joy, we can have absolute confidence in Christ. He is the one in charge, and He knows what He is doing.

The answer to the fears in our life is faith—faith that Jesus is there in the storms of life and will take us through any situation and get us out the other side. Every single one of us lives in these fragile earthen bodies. But beyond what is, there is something better yet coming—and that is the glory of Christ. There is something worth living for beyond this life, and that's Jesus Christ. Allow Him to fill your heart, to take away your fears, strengthen your resolve, and prepare you for His soon return. Jesus speaks these reassuring words to us: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

One day Jesus will come again. And on that wonderful day we will be caught up in the clouds in the sky to meet Him in the air. Sickness and suffering will be eradicated forever. Disease and death will be eradicated in the presence of our loving God. One of the major reasons we do not live in fear is that we

know the end game. We know that sickness will not have the last word: Christ will. We know the coronavirus, or any other virus, natural disaster, calamity, or nuclear war, will not destroy all life on Planet Earth. We have the promise of Jesus' return. We see famines. We see earthquakes. We see distress of nations. We see the rise of nuclear war. We see the potential of nuclear disaster. We see climate change. We see pestilences taking the lives of thousands. We see these things, but we have a hope that enables us to thrive in life's toughest times. There is a sense of confidence that takes us through, because we've read the last chapters of the Bible.

We know how the story ends. In Revelation 21:4, 5 John writes, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" We believe in the blessed hope in Titus 2:13 that Christ is coming again. So we look beyond what is to what will be. We look beyond today to tomorrow. We look beyond sickness to health. We look beyond the pestilences that are carried through the air to the pure air where there will be no more pestilences. God has a purpose in permitting these calamities to occur. He is calling us to totally, completely depend upon Him.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Which of these two come to us more naturally? 1. fear. 2. Faith.
2. What are the processes or procedures for building faith over fear?

#### **Prayer Points**

1. Pray that God may increase our faith.
2. Pray for special grace to face the challenges of life.
3. Get more prayer requests from participants

## **CHAPTER 3**

## **DISCOVERED: THE ULTIMATE VACCINE**

Research laboratories and university medical centers throughout the United States and around the world are racing at breakneck speed to find an effective vaccine for the coronavirus COVID-19. These trial vaccines are designed to produce a strong immune response, including an increased production of antibodies and protection that will last longer against viral and bacterial infections. Many universities, laboratories, and research institutes went into frantic attempt to discover a vaccine for COVID-19.

Even if the research goes well, it is expected to take more than a year before any vaccine could be widely available. Dozens of potential vaccines are being designed in labs around the world, for which the testing process is expected to begin during the next several months.

“The good thing is we’ve got a bunch of candidates,” Dr. Anthony Fauci, the NIH’s infectious diseases chief, said during a podcast for the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. One of the leading researchers in this field made this fascinating statement: “People are beating down the door to get into this trial.”

People are so afraid of this deadly, rapidly spreading virus that they are anxious to get a vaccine that will prevent them from contracting COVID-19. Although this present pandemic has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths around the world, there is another virus that has infested humanity that is even more deadly. COVID-19 may destroy your body, but this fatal disease can take more than your physical life. Jesus made this remarkable statement: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). The virus of sin is much more deadly than the coronavirus. COVID-19 can destroy the body, but sin can destroy our body and soul. Once infected with the virus of sin, the prognosis is death, unless a vaccine can be found. How did this pandemic begin, and what is the ultimate solution to the sin problem?

### **Another More Deadly Virus**

God created human beings in His image, but when Adam and Eve listened to the voice of the evil one in the Garden of Eden and yielded to his temptations, the virus of sin was passed from them to their descendants. This is why the prophet Jeremiah declares, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Isaiah adds, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). And do you remember the lament

of the apostle Paul when he cried out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). We have a disease that is fatal. It’s deadly, but just like so many people with the coronavirus who were asymptomatic, we walk around spreading the virus of sin to others without even realizing it at times.

There were many people during the height of this COVID-19 epidemic who apparently had no initial symptoms. They did not have a sore throat or a fever. They did not have fatigue or a cough. They appeared normal, but were walking around infecting others. Sometimes these people never showed signs of the disease, or developed only mild symptoms. But in others the disease burst upon them with

its full force. Their temperature rose, their breathing became labored, their bodies weak. They were fighting for their lives. The best efforts of the most outstanding medical personnel were powerless to save them. There was no medical remedy for the coronavirus, but thank God there is a remedy for the virus of sin.

### **The Divine Physician's Prescription**

There is One who can deliver us from sin's clutches. When the apostle Paul cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" he does not leave us with a lingering question. He answers his own question by triumphantly declaring, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24, 25). There is a Physician who has the remedy for the virus of sin. Jesus plunged into this cesspool of sin to meet the emergency. The Divine Physician entered the arena of human affairs with the antibodies to deliver us from sin's virus. He came to this snake pit of a fallen world with all its deadly venom, met the temptations of Satan head-on, and was victorious. He satisfied the demands of the law that we have broken. He died the death that was ours so we could live the life that was His. The cross reveals to the entire universe the depths Christ would go to save us. 1 Peter 2:24 and Galatians 2:20 tell us further about what Jesus did for us.

Marvel of all marvels, wonder of all wonders, in our shame and guilt Jesus did not reject us, He reached out in love to accept us. He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The cross speaks of a love so marvelous, so amazing, so divine, that it would rather take the condemnation, guilt, and penalty of sin upon itself than have even one of His children eternally lost. There is an insightful statement in *The Desire of Ages*, a book that reveals the depths of Christ's sacrifice. "Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish that the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as [the sinner's] substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753).

This is the story of grace. Christ's death on the cross delivers us from sin's condemnation, guilt, shame, and ultimate penalty. The shed blood of Christ is the only effective vaccine for the virus of sin. But the story does not end at the cross.

### **Jesus Is Alive**

If Jesus died and never rose again, He would be merely a martyr dying for a good cause. If He never conquered the tomb, what hope would we have of eternal life? It takes both the dying Christ and the living Christ to redeem us. The resurrected Christ delivers from sin's grip. Sin's dominion in our lives has been broken. It no longer holds us in its clutches. There is a power stronger than the influence of our heredity, our environment, or our past mistakes; it is the power of the living Christ, risen from the dead, changing our lives. If Christ's tomb were not empty, our lives could not be full. If His body were

still in the tomb, there would be no assurance that our bodies could ever leave the tomb. If He were not resurrected, we would have little hope of resurrection.

Here is the incredibly good news: The evidence of the literal, bodily resurrection of Christ is strong. In Matthew's Gospel we read, "The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'

" 'Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard" (Matthew 27:62-68, NIV).

Remember that Matthew was a tax collector, so we can expect him to be very detailed. Notice Pilate's words: "Make the tomb as secure as you know how." Here are four crucial points in this passage.

12. The scribes and Pharisees were concerned about Christ's resurrection.
13. Pilate ordered a Roman guard to watch the tomb.
14. A large stone was rolled over the entrance.
15. A Roman seal secured the tomb.

A contingent of Roman soldiers was mandated to protect the sepulcher. Roman military protocol demanded faithfulness to an assigned task. Any deviation from absolute loyalty and a failure to accomplish the assigned mission was punishable by death. Then we have the issue of the Roman seal. The soldiers affixed the Roman seal on the tomb, which was meant to prevent any attempt at vandalizing the sepulcher. The seal stood for the power and authority of the Roman Empire. Anyone trying to remove the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law. The Romans ruled Jerusalem with an iron fist and did not tolerate any challenge to Rome's authority.

It was not logical to think that the disciples could challenge the authority of Roman Government to make an attempt to break open the sepulcher and steal the body of Jesus. Josh McDowell makes a good point when he asserts that "so many security precautions were taken with the trial, crucifixion, burial, entombment, sealing, and guarding of Christ's tomb that it becomes very difficult for critics to defend their position that Christ did not rise from the dead."

### **Multiple Witnesses**

There are multiple witnesses of Christ's resurrection that testify that He is alive. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb. He appeared to the women who had come to anoint His body when they were on their way from the tomb. He appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus Road. He appeared to 10 of the 11 disciples in the upper room on Sunday night and again to Thomas and the disciples. He appeared to 500 believers gathered together on the hillsides of Galilee before His ascension into heaven. They reported that He appeared to them during a period of 40 days.

## **‘The Resurrection’s Life-changing Truths**

The Bible often clothes profound lessons in simple terms. Matthew’s Gospel simply states, “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb” (Matthew 28:1).

We pause for a moment to reflect on the significance of this passage. Think about the disciples’ thoughts that Sabbath. They were disappointed, discouraged, and downhearted. Their hopes had danced away like a shadow. Peter and John had left their prosperous fishing business to follow him. They had risked their future and their fortune on this itinerant Jewish preacher from Nazareth. But what now? What was their future? Jesus was dead.

Matthew had risked his entire career to follow Jesus. He had a secure position as a tax collector. He couldn’t go back to his previous employment now, with all the ridicule he had experienced. His career as a tax collector was over. What did his future look like during the hours of Friday night and Sabbath?

And think about Mary, this woman from Magdala. She was a woman of ill repute who had found forgiveness, mercy, and grace in Christ. For the first time in her life she had discovered One who loved her with a pure, unselfish, divine love. He had cast the demons out of her life that had tormented her for so long. In Him she had found a new hope. In Him she had discovered a reason for living. In Him she had new purpose. In Him she had a future today, tomorrow, and forever.

Consider Mary as she approached the tomb. The death of Christ had dashed their hopes and shattered their dreams. What thoughts must have been going through her mind? She must have wondered how to make sense out of the events of the past few days. She must have been confused, perplexed, and stunned by what had happened during the past 48 hours, but nevertheless she stepped out in faith to embalm His body.

The women did not have all their questions answered. They were confused about many of the events that had taken place that weekend and certainly had no idea how they would move the huge stone that sealed the tomb. The Roman guards certainly would never break the Roman seal on the tomb and open it for them. They had no idea how the problem would be solved, but this they knew: they had a duty to do, and they would leave the rest with God. You do not have to have all the answers to do what God places in your heart to do.

Faith does not mean you see; it means you trust. Faith is not knowing; it is believing. Faith is not having all the answers; it is having confidence that God still loves me and is working things out for my best when I do not understand. Remember the first verse in Matthew 28? “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn.” Here is an eternal truth. After the darkness the sun always rises. Night turns into day. In your hour of deepest darkness, Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, will rise in your life. You do not need to understand. Only believe. Believe He cares. Believe He loves you. Believe He has the best in mind for you. Believe that in the light of the resurrected Christ, the Sun will rise again for you. He is the light of the world and will chase the darkness away.



There is a strange twist in the Resurrection story. We find it in John 20:11-17. “But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping.” Two angels ask, “Why are you weeping?” She responds, “because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where [to find Him].” While

she was saying this, she turns and sees Jesus, but doesn’t recognize Him. There are many people who feel that they do not know where or how to find Jesus. The interesting thing is this: Mary was looking for Jesus, and He was standing right beside her. Her experience reminds us of God’s promise in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” and the promise in Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Through her tears she did not see Him, but He was there. Where is Christ when it seems you cannot find Him? Where is Jesus when your spiritual life has dried up and you wonder where He has gone? He is right there by your side to strengthen you, to encourage you, and to give you hope. It does seem a little strange, though, that Jesus did not first appear to Peter, James, John, or Matthew. Why did Jesus appear to Mary? Mary had the greatest need. Jesus is with us always, but in times of our greatest need He is preciously near. Here is the first life-changing lesson of the Resurrection story: Rejoice! Christ is risen! Morning has come. Darkness is gone. Hope has dawned.

There is a second eternal truth we cannot miss. The tomb is empty. Death has lost. Life has won. Satan could not keep Jesus in the ground. Christ’s resurrection points us to the day that Jesus will come, and our dead loved ones will be resurrected too. You may have recently lost a loved one. Like Mary, your eyes are filled with tears, your heart is broken, your grief is deep, but resurrection morning speaks hope. It speaks courage. It speaks of new life. Jesus has the antidote for the virus of sin. He died for us. He lives for us. He is coming again for us.

At the tomb of Christ that Resurrection morning, the last enemy was overcome. At the tomb of Christ that Resurrection morning, Satan’s greatest weapon was demolished. Death was defeated. Just exactly as Death was defeated, and Lazarus came out of the tomb alive (John 11:43). Now our hearts can beat with hope. The words of the apostle Paul come echoing down the corridors of time: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). Jesus’ resurrection is the eternal guarantee that those who have believed in Him and have been changed by His grace will one day be resurrected when He returns to take us home.

At the tomb of Christ that Resurrection morning, our eternal destiny was sealed, for without the Resurrection, the eternal life Christ promised could not be realized. This is the very reason the New Testament writers place such repeated emphasis on the Resurrection. They mention it hundreds of times. On that Resurrection morning 2,000 years ago Christ triumphed over Satan. Life triumphed over death. Faith triumphed over fear. Hope triumphed over despair. Joy triumphed over sorrow. It is time to rejoice. Christ has risen. Death has lost its hold on us, and one day soon Jesus is coming to take us home.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Which virus is more deadly than COVID-19?
2. Why is it that people are not afraid of the more deadly virus?
3. Ultimately who can deliver us from COVID-19 and from the more deadly virus?

### **Prayer Points**

1. Special power from heaven to overcome the more deadly virus—sin.
2. Pray that God may increase our trust and faith in the resurrected Savior.

## Chapter 4

### Thriving in Life's Toughest Times

Recently the world has experienced a life-threatening pandemic termed COVID-19. More than 2.5 million people were infected, with tens of thousands of deaths. During this time one of the greatest needs of medical professionals was personal protective equipment, or PPE. PPE refers to protective clothing, helmets, gloves, face shields, goggles, face masks, respirators, and other equipment designed to protect medical professionals from exposure to infection or illness. Because COVID-19 is airborne, it was crucial for medical professionals to have the necessary protective equipment. During the crisis there was a shortage of personal protective equipment in some areas, so many health-care workers, physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and nurses contracted COVID-19. Although these medical personal were extremely busy serving others, they were not immune from the virus. They needed personal protective equipment to survive.

#### **Another Deadly Pandemic**

There is another deadly pandemic with a virus that is even more fatal than the coronavirus. Sin's virus has infected the entire human family, and we are on the front lines of the battle. Each one of us during sin's pandemic also need PPE—personal protective equipment. If in our busyness we neglect our personal protective equipment, we are likely to be infected with the virus of sin. If in our frantic rush through life we do not take time to care for the spiritual part of our nature, we may contract a spiritual disease that is deadly and fatal.

#### **The Apostle Paul's Counsel**

The apostle Paul wrote, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:12, 13). The armour of God is our PPE—our personal protective equipment—against the virus of sin. When medical professionals entered a coronavirus patient's room, they would not think of entering without some type of protective gear on. What is this protective equipment divinely given to us by God in this conflict between good and evil? The apostle Paul gives us a hint in 2 Corinthians 10:4: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." What are these weapons of God? How can we be prepared spiritually for the crises we face in our personal lives? What is the source of our spiritual strength? What resources has God given us to fight the virus of sin? One of God's choice weapons is His Word. Scripture reveals, "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

#### **God's Word: A Creative Word**

The inspired Word of God contains life changing principles. The creative power of the Word of God illuminates our darkness. It changes us. When God spoke the word at Creation, our planet came into existence. He created this world by His all-powerful Word. The psalmist states, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6-9). Paul states this remarkable truth: "God . . . calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17).

The power of the Word brings light into darkened minds. The power of the Word quenches thirsty souls and feeds hungry hearts. It re-creates the soul in the image of God. It strengthens us in the battle between good and evil. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He met Satan head-on with these words: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ ” (Matthew 4:4).

Is the Bible merely an inspiring book, like many other inspired books, or is it truly a divinely inspired book given to us by God? If the Bible is God’s divine revelation to all humanity, then we neglect its teachings at the peril of eternal loss. If the Bible is simply an inspiring human document, then it has little power to radically transform our lives. So the question of the Bible’s inspiration is critically important. In fact, it may be a matter of life and death. Let’s examine the evidence.

### **The Inspiration of the Bible**

A young shepherd discovered on the shores of the Dead Sea, in 1947 the Dead Sea scrolls. These scrolls were written by the Qumran community approximately 150 years before Christ. These people were called the Essenes. They spent hours hand copying the Bible. To ensure accuracy, their copying laws were extremely strict. Some of the world’s most outstanding Bible scholars and specialists in ancient biblical languages have pored over these manuscripts for decades. These ancient scrolls eloquently testify to the accuracy and reliability of the Bible.

From the Bible’s first book, Genesis, to its last, Revelation, it answers our deepest questions and speaks to our heart’s deepest needs. The Bible was written during a 1,500-year span by more than 40 authors. Many of these authors did not know one another. They lived in different places, spoke different languages, and were products of different cultures, yet each one writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit presents God’s eternal plan for the human race clearly. There is no contradiction on these main themes of Scripture. There is an amazing unity of thought and purpose throughout the Bible. The fulfilment of numerous biblical prophecies reveals the truthfulness of Scripture. There are approximately 31,000 verses in the Bible, and a little more than 8,000 of these—more than 25 percent—contain prophecy. These prophecies are amazingly accurate, revealing the names of nations and world rulers.

Babylon, the Medes and Persians, Greece and Rome, including the divided Roman Empire (see Daniel 2; 7; 8). They reveal in advance the smallest details of Christ's life. (see Numbers 24:17). see Zacharias 11:11, 12). Isaiah 61:1-3.

### **The Bible’s Main Purpose**

The Bible touches on many disciplines: history, science, psychology, and yet it is not a treatise offering answers to these disciplines. Although God’s Word touches on a variety of disciplines, it is first and foremost a revelation of God’s will, revealing God’s eternal truths to humanity. The Bible answers the three great questions of life: “Why am I here?” “Where did I come from?” and “What does the future hold?” It provides hope and courage for each one of us.

The Bible brings a message of hope and courage that finds its answer in the person of Jesus. Being the central character, it presents His person, His character, and His ministry under different metaphors and images as lamb of God, the king who comes, who has come and who will return. Similarly, the scriptural symbols of the Word, including light, fire, hammer, seed and bread all present us with its ability to change our lives.

### **Symbols of God’s Word**

The psalmist David declares, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). He also adds, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (verse

130). The Word of God lights the pathway of the followers of Christ. It guides us home. Jesus is the “light of the world” who lights up our darkness through His Word (John 8:12). It dispels the darkness that Satan has enshrouded their lives with, and lightens their pathway to the kingdom of God.

In Jeremiah 23:29 God’s Word is compared to both a fire and a hammer. It is compared to a fire because it consumes. When we read the Word of God, the fire of God’s Word burns within us, consuming error. Like gold refined in the fire, the dross is consumed. The refining process is not always pleasant, but it is necessary to remove the dross in our characters.

God’s Word is also like a hammer. The term hammer may seem to be a rare term to use to describe the Bible. Hammers nail things together. They also smash things. The hammer of God’s Word smashes hard hearts to pieces. Think of the dramatic changes that took place in the lives of the demoniacs, the Roman centurion, the thief on the cross, and a host of others throughout the New Testament.

In one of the more common symbols in Scripture, the Bible is compared to “seed.” In Luke 8:11 Jesus states, “The seed is the word of God.” There is life in a tiny seed. When the seed of God’s Word is planted in the soil of the mind, it produces an abundant harvest in the life. Jesus often used the symbolism of seed to describe the growth of His kingdom. The Word of God scattered like seed throughout the world will produce a bountiful harvest. Jesus expands on this theme in one of His farming parables. “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how’ ” (Mark 4:26, 27).

The Word of God may seem buried someplace within the mind. It may seem to be covered under the clods of sin, but if it is cherished, it will spring forth into new life. It will radically change our attitudes, our conversation, our habits, and our lifestyle.

### **Seed is life-giving**

We may not see the seed growing, but it is growing in our minds to produce its life-giving results. The Bible also uses the term bread to describe the Word of God. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). He adds, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Bread is the staff of life throughout the ancient world and one of our planet’s basic foods. It is an essential dietary item. An individual can survive a long time on only bread and water. By using the illustration of bread, Jesus is declaring that He is essential for life. In His well-known bread-of-life sermon (following the miracle of the feeding of 5,000) Jesus declares, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (John 6:54). This seems to be a very strange statement. What could Jesus possibly be talking about? Obviously He was not talking about literally eating His flesh and drinking His blood. By feasting on His Word, His teachings become a very part of our lives. This is what Jeremiah meant when he joyfully declared, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16). The Word of God, like a good piece of whole-wheat bread, satisfies our hidden hunger. Have you ever noticed that highly refined products are neither satisfying nor filling?

### **The Indestructibility of the Bible**

Infidels have tried to destroy credibility in the Bible for centuries. Their goal is to use sophisticated arguments to erode faith in God’s Word, yet the Bible remains the best seller of all time. Each year more than 100 million copies of the Bible are sold or given away free. Guinness World Records estimates that more than 5 billion copies of the Bible have been printed in hundreds of languages. The French philosopher Voltaire, was a fierce critic of Christianity. He believed that the Bible was filled with “absurdities” and that society was living in the “twilight of Christianity.” As a prolific writer he

wrote 20,000 letters and 2,000 books. A significant portion of his writings were an attack on the Christian faith and the Bible. It is reported that near the end of his life he declared that his writings would displace the Bible. He believed that within 100 years the Scriptures would be a relic of the past and soon forgotten. Within 25 years of Voltaire's death, the printing presses that had published his works were used for printing Bibles in the common language of the people.

There is another interesting aspect of this story. Daniel Merritt, Ph.D., Th.D., has done extensive research on Voltaire and reports that Henri Tronchin, who served as president of the Geneva Bible Society from 1834 to 1839, lived in Voltaire's former residence. When the Bibles were printed on the press that previously printed Voltaire's books, many of them were stored in Voltaire's home, then occupied by the president of the Geneva Bible Society less than 100 years later. What an amazing twist to the story. This reminds us of Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:35: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Isaiah the prophet adds, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). The Bible has been maligned, criticized, ridiculed, torn apart, and burned, yet it stands as a testimony to its divine authorship. It speaks of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and new life to every generation.

The greatest testimony of the inspiration of the Bible is its ability through the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives completely.

#### **Questions for discussion**

1. List two to three arguments that you believe are remarkable evidence of the divine origin of the Bible.
2. The Bible presents several vivid and colorful metaphors of God's living word. Which ones have you experienced recently?
3. The Bible is neither a treatise on science nor philosophy, yet it essentially and authoritatively addresses the great questions of life for which philosophy and science bite their tails in vain human speculations. What are the Bible's specific fields of interest?

#### **Prayer points:**

1. May God develop in each of us favorable provisions with regard to His Word.
2. May God give us the power to apply the lessons and promises of His Holy Word to our daily lives.

## CHAPTER 5

### STAYING HEALTHY IN A SICK WORLD

Sickness is not only debilitating to the body but also plays havoc with our minds. When we are sick, it is much easier to become discouraged or even depressed. Have you ever been sick for a week? How do you feel at the end of the week? What about two weeks? During the COVID-19 pandemic those infected with the disease reported overwhelming physical symptoms, including a raging fever followed by the chills, intense muscle pain, a persistent cough, shortness of breath, a sore throat, violent headaches, and fatigue. One victim said, “I felt like I was drowning,” and another added, “Nights were horrible. My temperature would rise. My body would burn with fever, and then suddenly I would shake with the chills. But worst of all, I felt so alone in isolation.” Tragically some people even died in lonely hospital rooms, isolated from their families. It is incredibly difficult to suffer in the advanced stages of the coronavirus for two weeks, but what if you were sick for 12 years?

Mark’s Gospel records the story of a woman who suffered for 12 long years. “Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years” (Mark 5:25). She hemorrhaged continually. Her clothes were stained with this continual stream of blood. She was tired, worn out, emaciated, and weak. But worst of all, she could no longer experience the warm embrace of others. She wanted to be well. She longed for healing. She searched for a cure, but nothing seemed to work.

Mark’s Gospel continues her story in these sorrowful words: “[She] had suffered many things from many physicians” (verse 26). She was not only desperate but hopeless. She had spent her money on these so-called physicians, only to be worse off. Then she met the Master Physician, Jesus.

This poor woman wondered if she would ever get near enough to beg for healing. He had healed others. Would He heal her? Mark’s Gospel reveals her desperation in these words: “If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well” (verse 28). Luke was a physician and reveals some fascinating details in his Gospel. In Luke 8:43 he tells the story of this poor suffering woman, and he says, “[She] could not be healed by any” of the physicians. No therapy could be found for her. Nothing that she had tried had worked. Jesus was her last and only hope for help. If He could not help her, she was doomed to a life of constant pain and continual sickness. She pressed her way through the crowd, believing if she could only touch the hem of Christ’s garment, she would be healed. Her response is the typical response of many a person today when they face some debilitating disease. They are desperate to find something, anything, that will cure the disease. Every patient wants something to cure their illness, anything that will bring relief. Modern medicine focuses on diagnosing and healing disease, but Jesus focuses on something more—much more.

Finally, she was able to stretch her hand between two people crowding around Jesus and briefly touch just the hem of His garment. In that touch was concentrated the faith of her life. The Master can distinguish the touch of faith from the press of the crowd. Healing power flowed into her body. The disease was gone. She was miraculously healed. “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well” (verse 48). She is a child of God. Jesus calls her daughter. He encourages her with the words “Be of good cheer; your faith has made you well” (verse 48). Her faith grasped the reality of His divinity. In His loving mercy He revealed His grace to this desperate, hopeless woman and made her well again. Physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually she was made well. This is the work of Jesus. Our total health matters to Jesus because we matter to Jesus. He longs for us to live life to the fullest in this world of sickness, suffering, and death.



## **Restoration: The Goal of Jesus' Life**

This world is facing an enormous crisis. Jesus' own predictions in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 foretell catastrophic conditions on the earth just before His return. These events will break upon this world as an overwhelming surprise for those who are unprepared. At Creation God surrounded Adam and Eve with all the elements necessary for optimum health. Flowing streams provided them with pure water. Fruits, nuts, grains, and some types of vegetables grew in abundance. The natural diet God provided was packed with wholesome nutrients. As our first parents exercised in the sunshine and fresh air, their bodies maintained the health God created them with. On the seventh day, Sabbath, they entered into an experience of deeper trust as they worshipped their Creator on the special day that He had sanctified, or set apart, for worship. It is God's intent that we discover principles from Eden to guide our lives today. God is not interested only in our spiritual health but in our physical and emotional health as well. There is a close relationship between our physical and spiritual well-being. John states: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2).

## **Science Confirms We Are Whole Human Beings**

The World Health Organization that since 1948 had defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being has now recognized the need for a fourth component, spirituality, to be considered as an important element of health. A growing body of scientific evidence confirms the accuracy of the Bible's teaching on health. Degenerative diseases, as the result of faulty living habits, are rapidly rising. Heart disease, strokes, and cancer top the list of killer diseases taking the lives of people prematurely. Here are three specific areas where faith can make a dramatic difference in your health.

### ***1. Faith leads people to make better health choices.***

Fewer people who are religious and have a deep commitment to God smoke, abuse alcohol, or use harmful drugs. They exercise more, eat more healthfully, and guard their rest. They are guided by the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." People of faith become more conscious of their health and choose to live more healthfully. Recently Harvard University conducted a massive study to determine what health habits could keep people living longer. This is what they discovered: by maintaining five health habits, you may be able to add as many as 10 years to your life. Here are the simple habits that will increase your life expectancy: eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, keeping a healthy body weight, not drinking too much alcohol, and not smoking. Maintaining these habits during adulthood may add more than a decade to life expectancy, according to a new study led by the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health (Harvard University study, April 2019).

Let's look at these health builders a little more carefully. One of the very critical issues with COVID-19—and all other diseases, for that matter—is strengthening our immune systems. The immune system is a complex network of cells and proteins that defends our bodies against infections and disease. If you build a strong immune system, not only do you reduce the risk of getting sick, but if you do get sick, the symptoms will tend to be much less, and the duration of your illness shorter. There is no guarantee that any one of us will not get sick. However, there are certainly ways we can protect ourselves and build our immunity.

**a. Eat Healthy:** Nutrition is key in any illness both as prevention and assisting in the cure. Fruits and vegetables, as well as whole grains, reduce inflammation and improve blood vessel function. Plant foods are loaded with health-promoting, protective phytochemicals that neutralize the oxidative stress of infections and other diseases. They reduce inflammation and enhance the health of the blood vessel

lining to assure needed blood supply. Animal protein has inflammatory substances that break down the bodies' immune system. Plant foods, including beans, legumes, salads, and vegetables, provide the building blocks to produce the substances that make blood vessels work well. We also suggest a rainbow of colors on your plate, assuring that all the protective nutrients are included in your diet both as prevention and as adjunct to cure if you do get sick. Of course, avoiding sugar is a must, as sugar impairs white blood cell function, which is vital in fighting off foreign substances in our bodies.

**b. Drink Lots of Water:** Water protects the body from dehydration, allowing every cell to function and fight at peak performance. Therefore, it is a key element to enhancing our immune system. So drink lots of water! How much? At least eight (eight-ounce) glasses a day. Another way to monitor if you are getting enough is to drink enough so that you have at least one clear urination per day.

**c. Get Adequate Fresh Air and Exercise:** People who walk briskly at least five times a week for a minimum of 30 minutes per day have better health and live longer than those who do not exercise. Exercise is profoundly helpful in warding off disease. Each day, get out in the fresh air, breathe deeply, and walk with your head erect and your shoulders back. If you live in a city environment, look for a park to walk in that has shrubs and trees. It is unhealthful to breathe in the polluted air from the exhaust of vehicles in the traffic-jammed streets of our crowded cities. Trees and plants have life-giving properties that will build your health.

**d. Get Plenty of Rest:** One of the God-given principles of good health is rest. When we are ill, our bodies recover best when we rest. Even when we think we have recovered from an illness, it is best to be cautious and be sure to get extra rest for a few days. Rest is an important part of any good health plan. In fact, that's why once a week God has given us the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest from the stresses of life.

**e. Avoid Tobacco, Alcohol, Harmful Drugs, and Stimulants:** Cigarette smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the world. It contributes to hundreds of thousands of deaths each year. It is a major risk factor for heart disease, lung cancer, type 2 diabetes, and a host of other lifestyle diseases. It weakens the immune system, contributes to gum disease, heightens the risk of infertility, and is a cause of blood clots. Alcohol is a major contributor to premature death. It is a cause of some types of cancer, heart disease, and liver damage. Along with tobacco it is dangerously addictive. The conclusions of a recent British study, published in the renowned medical journal *The Lancet*, are "clear and unambiguous: alcohol is a colossal global health issue." The chief medical officer of the UK found that there is "no safe level of alcohol consumption."

## ***2. Faith leads people to be more optimistic and positive.***

This positive attitude helps them to reduce stress and hypertension. They are more at peace and have calmer dispositions. The University of Rochester's medical newsletter reports, "The idea of optimism leading to better health has been studied. Researchers have reviewed the results of over 80 studies to look for common findings. They found optimism had a remarkable impact on physical health. The message is that having a positive attitude can boost your physical health, no matter what might be ailing you." Faith leads to a deep trust in God, and that trust in God leads you to be much more optimistic and positive about life because you know God cares for you and is always seeking your best.

## ***16. Faith leads people to attend church more. The greater support system and sense of community contributes to greater well-being.***

The University of California, Berkeley, reported in 2002 the results of a 31-year study of more than 6,500 adults in Alameda, California. The comprehensive report noted, “People who attend religious services have significantly lower risks of death compared with those who never attend or attend less frequently even if you adjust for age, health behaviors, and other risk factors.” Churchgoers live up to seven years longer than nonattendeers, a University of Texas study has found. Researchers found that life expectancy rose when the number of church services attended increased. Those who attended every week had a life expectancy of 82 years. This dropped to 79 years for those who attended less than once a week, and for nonattendeers it dropped to about 75 years (*The Sunday Mail*, September 26, 1999, p. 55).

In Hebrews 10:23-25 the Bible shares this positive benefit of church attendance. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

### **How to Make Positive Changes**

You may be wondering, *How can I make positive changes in my life? Where can I find the strength to put into practice good health practices? I have tried before and failed.* The key to change is uniting our weak wills with Christ’s all-powerful strength. We may be weak, but He is strong. We may be frail, but He is almighty. On our own we cannot, but with Him we can. It all begins with our personal choice. All change begins with choice. The more we make excuses for our behavior, the more we will create a barrier to success. We see the impossibilities, but God is the God of possibilities.

He is the God who can make a way when we see no way. Ephesians 3:20, 21: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” What can God do? He can do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Our hearts may not be able to grasp how He can strengthen our weak wills, but this we know: **God is able.**

It may not seem possible, but God is able.

It may not seem logical, but God is able.

It may not seem likely, but God is able.

When under the promptings of the Holy Spirit we choose to make choices to live in harmony with the Creator’s laws and give glory to Him in our lifestyle, He gives us the power to accomplish our desires. Our Creator creates within us the new life we have chosen to live as we commit ourselves to Him.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. In your assessment, is it possible to stay healthy in a sin sick world? Since Christ will restore our health in His return, does it matter how I make my health choices?
2. Does faith impact physical health? How will you use your faith to improve your physical health?

3. Which of the Adventist health principles shared in the lesson (healthy eating, drinking lots of water, rest, exercise, getting adequate pure air, temperance) do you find difficult to practice? What can you do to make it easy to keep to enrich your health?
4. What positive changes, no matter how small, would you make to enhance your health and that of your family, church and community?

**Prayer Points:**

1. Pray for forgiveness for the times you made wrong healthy lifestyle choices.
2. Ask God to give you the will power to make healthy lifestyle choices to guard your total health.
3. Seek God to intervene in the life of people you see engaged in dangerous lifestyle choices.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to transform recipients and readers of the 2021 Missionary Book of the year.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Day After the Day After**

As the world races through the twenty-first century, have you ever considered what our greatest need is? What do men and women living in the twenty-first century need most? If you were starving, it might be food. If you were homeless, it might be a place to live. If disease ravaged your body, it might be medicine. If you were lonely and discouraged, it might be love. Is there one thing more than any other that could take you through any difficulty you might face in life? Is there one thing that can make the human spirit soar? All over the world people are desperately looking for hope. Someone has well said, “What oxygen is to the lungs, hope is to the human spirit.” Hope buoys up our spirits. It lifts our vision from what is to what will be. It is a candle in the darkness. It provides encouragement for the future. Hope is one thing that lifts the human spirit and keeps us going amid the challenges we face. What is hope? How can we define it? Hope is that intangible quality that looks beyond life’s difficulties to a better tomorrow. It leads us to live purposeful lives today because we know a new day is coming. It anticipates the best in life, even when we are facing the worst in life. It looks beyond what is to what will be. It keeps believing, trusting, anticipating, and expecting that out of today’s darkness, tomorrow’s light will shine more brightly.

The Roman statesman Pliny the Elder once said, “Hope is the pillar that holds up the world.” He was right. Without hope, this world is on a collision course to disaster. Without hope, the foundations of society collapse. Without hope, we live our lives in silent despair. Hope powerfully motivates us to look for the day after tomorrow. It paints the future in bright colors rather than dark shadows.

### **Rediscovering Hope**

In a world that seems out of control, how can we rediscover hope? In a world that seems so uncertain, how can we hope again? In a world devastated by tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, pestilences, and pandemics, is there something certain we can base our hope on? For example, the recent coronavirus pandemic has had catastrophic consequences. People all over the world have been infected. Tens of thousands have died. The world economy has been shattered. Unemployment rates have skyrocketed. Our lives have been changed forever. Where can we find hope? How can we look beyond our present trials to a brighter future the day after tomorrow?

Millions have found hope, assurance, and peace in a personal knowledge of and relationship with God through studying His Word. They have discovered a God who loves them more than they imagined and who strengthens them to face the challenges of today and the trials of tomorrow with incredible courage. He is the God of hope.

In a time of desperation the psalmist David cried out, “For You are my hope, O Lord God” (Psalm 71:5). Hope began for David where it begins for all of us. It began with the belief that there was a God in heaven who was bigger than his problems, greater than his difficulties, and larger than any challenge he might face. Without a knowledge of a God who cares for us, understands our pain, and heals our hurts, and who will one day defeat all the powers of hell and usher in a new world, we are left without hope to face life’s challenges alone. It is this sense of God’s presence, unconditional love, and constant care that fills our hearts with hope.

### **The Bible: The Book of Hope**

The Bible is a book filled with hope. Its stories are about people like you and me. Sometimes they were strong and conquered mightily for God. At other times they were weak and failed miserably, but in each of these instances God was there to give them hope to face tomorrow. The word “hope” is used

more than 125 times in the Bible. The apostle Paul, who faced so many challenging situations, used it more than 40 times. He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned, yet he was filled with hope. Writing to his friends living in Rome, he declared, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). As we place our hope in a God who is bigger than any problem we ever face, our hearts are filled with “joy and peace in believing.” The confidence that there is a God who loves us beyond what we can ever understand fills us with hope. There is never a circumstance that we face in life that God is not prepared to handle.

### **In Christ there is hope**

There is never a challenge we find ourselves facing when there is not hope in Christ. There is an old hymn that says, “Just when I need Him, Jesus is near . . . just when I need Him most.” This Christ, who has created us and cares for us, has redeemed us. We are twice His. When the beings He perfectly created rebelled against His will in Eden’s garden, Love provided a way. There was hope for Adam’s race. Jesus is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Heaven’s plan of salvation echoed throughout the entire universe. God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, left heaven and came to this rebel planet to reveal God’s love to unnumbered worlds and satisfy the demands of justice. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. In His life and death, He revealed the Father’s love. He met the demands of the law and resisted Satan’s most vicious temptations. He lived the perfect life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died. Although “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). His grace, forgiveness, and mercy flow from His heart of infinite love. Billy Graham put it well when he said, “God’s mercy and grace give me hope—for myself, and for our world.” As the song says: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

There is hope in Christ—hope that our sins are not too great to be forgiven, hope that our temptations are not too great to be overcome, hope that our challenges are not too great to be conquered, and hope that our tomorrows will be much better than today. Still Christ offers us more—much more—than the assurance that He is with us today. The hope that Christ offers is a hope that looks beyond this world to the next. It is the hope of His soon return. The apostle Paul beautifully blends Christ’s first coming to earth to redeem us with His second coming to take us home. In an encouraging letter to his young friend Titus, the apostle declares that we are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:13, 14). Jesus came once to reveal the Father’s love and to earn the legal right to redeem us. He is coming a second time to claim His purchased possession.

### **Hope Beyond Tomorrow**

In more than 1,500 places the Bible speaks about the return of Christ. It is emphasized once in every 25 verses in the New Testament and for every prophecy about the first coming of Christ in the Old Testament, there are eight highlighting the second coming of Christ or the return of Christ to this world in glory. Here are just a few examples of the hopeful promises throughout the Bible of Christ’s soon return.

The first prediction of the return of Christ to this world is given by Enoch. “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints’ ” (Jude 14 ). More than 3,000 years before the first coming of Jesus, Enoch predicted that the Messiah would come not only as the suffering servant to die for our sins, but also as the conquering king who would come to deliver us from this sinful world and vanquish all evil. The psalmist David adds his testimony by declaring, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him” (Psalm 50:3 ). The prophet Isaiah encourages us all to have hope. There is coming a day when Christ will return, and the forces of hell that cause so much disaster in our world will be defeated forever. In Isaiah 35 the prophet states, “Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you’ ” (verse 4 ). The biblical prophets lived in hope, not despair. They looked beyond the challenges, trials, and difficulties they faced in their lives to a brand-new tomorrow. With prophetic insight and divine eyesight their view penetrated the future. They had absolute confidence that Christ would return, and that sin, suffering, heartache, sorrow, disease, and death would be no more.

### **Jesus’ Own Promise**

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He assured His followers, “I will come again.” The fact that Jesus is coming to the world a second time is as certain as the reality that He lived on this earth 2,000 years ago. There is hope on the way. The promise of Christ’s return rings with reassurance. The Savior encouraged His disciples with this promise: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3 ).

Christ’s comforting words are like a promissory note: Jesus said He would return—and we can bank on it! The second coming of Christ is not based on idle speculation. It is not based on a vain wish or human philosophy. It is based on the unchangeable, reliable, certain promises of God’s Word. The second coming of Christ reveals the tremendous truth that all of history is moving toward one glorious climax. We have a final destiny. Life is going somewhere, and we are to meet Someone who has the ultimate answer to all of life’s problems—and without this conviction, there is little left to live for. Jesus’ words come echoing down the centuries: “Let not your heart be troubled.” Stop worrying. There is no need to be anxious. This world is not all there is. Cling to My promise. Trust My word. “You believe in God, believe also in Me. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come again.” The promise of Christ’s soon return lifts our spirits. It encourages our hearts. It brightens our days. It illumines our nights. It makes every mountain we climb easier.

Notice a few expressions in this passage. They are going to encourage your heart. Jesus says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” The word “mansions” is better translated “abodes,” “dwelling places,” or “residences.” Here is what Jesus is saying: “There is plenty of room in My eternal kingdom. There is no shortage of space. There is room for you.”

The apostle John echoes these words in the Bible’s last book, in Revelation 7:9: “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.” Heaven has enough room for all. The sacrifice of Christ is enough for all. The cross of Calvary provides redemption for all who will receive it. Jesus is assuring His disciples that there is plenty of room in heaven for each one of them and that He will come back to take them to Himself.



What does it mean that Jesus is preparing a place for us? It certainly does not mean that He is a construction foreman directing the angels how to build our heavenly mansions. Jesus ascends to heaven and, in the presence of the Father, receives the assurance that His sacrifice is accepted. The gates of heaven are opened for all humankind.

In light of the great controversy between good and evil in the universe, Jesus assures us that, through His grace and because of His death on the cross, we can live eternally with Him. He assures us that He will be our advocate, our defense attorney, in heaven's final judgment. Daniel 7 describes this cosmic judgment. There are 10,000 times 10,000 heavenly beings that gather around God's throne. Heaven's eternal records are open to the universe. With all-absorbing interest the entire universe watches. The destinies of the entire human race are now to be settled. Men and women will be eternally saved or eternally lost. Jesus steps forth in the judgment and declares that all those who by genuine faith have accepted His sacrifice and are transformed by His grace have both their title and fitness for heaven. The prophet Daniel triumphantly declares that "judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High" (Daniel 7:22 ). We are filled with hope because the One who died for us lives for us. Our joy overflows because the One who died for us and lives for us is coming again for us.

### **The Disciples Died Triumphantly in Hope**

Think of the deaths of the disciples. It is commonly believed that each of them suffered a martyr's death, except John, but this is what we know for sure. James was beheaded by Herod. Filled with hope, he wrote, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7 ). Martyrdom did not quench his spirit or destroy his hope. Peter was crucified upside down, likely in A.D. 66 by Nero's Roman guard. He died in hope. Here are his words: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13 ).

The apostle Paul spent years in a damp Roman dungeon and then was likely beheaded about the same time as Peter was martyred by Nero in A.D. 66. Yet filled with hope and assurance, he looked beyond what was to what will be. He believed that Christ had conquered the tomb and that one day Jesus would return as He had promised, to deliver him from the stranglehold of death. This courageous disciple of Christ clung to the promises of God's Word. He believed that "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). The apostle Paul did not die a defeated, broken man. He was buoyed up by the promise of Christ's return, and died in hope.

Consider the apostle John. He was burned in a cauldron of boiling oil and as an old man in his 90s exiled to the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian. During his exile on this lonely isle, Jesus Christ gave John a vision of His return. He wrote about that vision in the Bible's last book, Revelation. John's words are filled with hope: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Revelation 1:7 ). Jesus' return to this world will certainly not be a secret event. Every eye will see Jesus when He returns. The eyes of the young, and the eyes of the old. The eyes of the educated, and the eyes of the uneducated; the eyes of the rich, and the eyes of the poor. People from all cultures, nationalities, languages, groups, and countries will see Him come.

Both the first chapter of Revelation and the last chapter ring with the certainty of Christ's return. On the last page of the Bible—in the last chapter of the last book—Jesus promises further: "And behold, I

am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12 ).

Each one of the disciples, except John, died a martyr’s death, yet they were triumphant. They were faithful in the face of incredibly challenging circumstances. They were filled with an inner peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7 ). They clung to Christ’s Word. They believed Christ’s promise: “I will come again!” The words of the angels at Christ’s ascension rang in their ears. “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (Acts 1:9-11 ).

Don’t miss the fact that on this occasion angels, as heavenly messengers from God, confirmed Christ’s promise and testified to its literal truthfulness: “This same Jesus” was not a ghostly spirit, but had “flesh and bones,” to use Jesus’ own words (Luke 24:39). He “will so come in like manner” as He ascended to heaven. Jesus’ ascension to heaven was a real, literal event. His return will again be a very real, literal event. Soon He is coming again to take us home.

Every challenge you face, every difficulty you experience, every trial you meet, will soon be over. Cling to the promise of Jesus’ soon return, let your heart soar with hope, and let peace flood your soul. The Bible is a book of hope, because there is a day after the day after tomorrow. There is something beyond this life. We have this hope that burns within our hearts—the hope of the coming of our Lord. And that hope is enough to see us through all of life’s challenges. “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:30, 31).

The Bible constantly points us to a better tomorrow. It holds out the promise that one day Jesus Christ will return. Evil will be destroyed. Righteousness will reign forever. Sin, sickness, and suffering will be no more. Disease, disaster, and death will be vanquished. Wickedness, war, and worry will vanish away. The apostle Paul calls this glorious event “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13 ). What a hope! Jesus Christ will return. Death will not have the last word; Jesus will. One day soon our loved ones who have died believing in and living for Christ will be resurrected from their graves to see Him face to face. One day soon the hopes of all the ages will be realized. Jesus Christ will return, and we who are alive to experience this spectacular, glorious event will be caught up to meet Him in the air. We will travel with Him on the most amazing space journey ever to the most amazing place in the universe and live with Him throughout all eternity.

We need not worry about the future. We do not have to let fear grip our hearts and strangle our joy. Christ has created us. Christ has redeemed us. Christ cares for us. Christ sustains us, and Christ is coming again to take us home. Now, that is something to be hopeful about.

#### **Questions for discussion**

1. What is hope?
2. Where and how can we find hope?

### **Prayer Points**

17. Pray that all members will rediscover hope and bring it to their communities.
18. Pray that all members have a deep relationship with Jesus Christ.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN THE ECONOMY COLLAPSES**

We are just beginning to experience the long-term economic consequences of COVID-19 on our personal lives and our families. The short-term consequences with thousands dead and hundreds of thousands more sick were bad enough, but there are significant additional consequences that society now faces. The economic impact of the pandemic is hitting many families full force. Many of the unemployed during the crisis are going back to work, but they are still experiencing the effects of lost income from their time off, and the debts they incurred. The stock market plummeted during the pandemic, with millions of people losing almost all their life savings. The entire world economy is on extremely shaky footing, and we wonder whether life will ever be the same. The economic picture for the foreseeable future is dire. Many of the businesses forced to shut down because of the lockdowns may never recover. In a report to Adventist Church leaders, investment specialist Tim Aka made this astute observation: “Many people are living paycheck to paycheck with little or no savings.” The results of the coronavirus pandemic has thrown them into a financial dilemma. The international markets have experienced a serious downturn. Dozens of countries could soon suffer from devastating famines as a result of the coronavirus, an official with the United Nations said. Famines of “biblical proportions” may be experienced in the coming months because of such factors as reductions in foreign aid, the price of oil, and tourism, according to David Beasley, director of the UN’s World Food Programmed Branch. “There are no famines yet,” Beasley said. “But I must warn you that if we don’t prepare and act now—to secure access, avoid funding shortfalls and disruptions to trade—we could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a few short months.” “Millions of civilians living in conflict-scarred nations, including many women and children, face being pushed to the brink of starvation, with the specter of famine a very real and dangerous possibility” (New York *Daily News*, April 22, 2020).

### **Confronting the Issues**

What impact will all of this have on our personal finances? How will this impact our families? What impact will this disruption in society have on our mental health? What long-term consequences might there be on our physical health? Most of all, what can we do to survive the catastrophic consequences of COVID-19 and other pandemics or catastrophes that strike us? This is not the first disaster that has ever hit our world, and it will not be the last. How can we stay strong amid these worldwide epidemics and natural disasters that are striking our world with increasing frequency? In this chapter we will focus on four specific areas of survival: (1) How you can survive financially in a time of crisis; (2) How your

family and especially your children can survive; (3) How you can survive physically; (4) How you can survive emotionally.

## **How to Survive a Financial Crash**

Norman Cousins, editor of *Saturday Review*, made a very perceptive statement 40 years ago. It was true then, but it is even truer now. “We are so busy extending ourselves and increasing the size and ornamentation of our personal kingdom that we have hardly considered that no age in history has had so many loose props under it as our own.” We are so busy buying that we have failed to realize that there are some moral screws loose in our society. The foundation is cracking. We might just be investing our money in the wrong places. The Bible presents eternal financial principles that make sense. It reveals financial secrets that most of the world does not know. It encourages us to reevaluate our priorities—to seek the eternal rather than the earthly. God’s Word leads us to make investments that will pay off in the long run. Here are three financial principles outlined in the Bible that will enable you to survive any financial crisis.

### ***1. Accept the eternal truth that God is the Creator of this world and the owner of everything in it.***

In Psalm 50 David records God’s words to him at a time of great need. God reminds him that He is the Creator and in charge of this world in these words: “Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness” (Psalm 50:10-12). God is the true owner of this world, both by creation and redemption. Everything we have is a gift of His grace. We are stewards of goods entrusted to us by God. We are and were Christ’s. He created us, and He redeemed us. This world is His. He made it in the first place and shed His blood to redeem it. Understanding this concept—that Christ created us and redeemed us—makes all the difference. What we have is really not our own. A steward is one who manages another person’s property, finances, or other affairs. And that is what we are—stewards—under God. For we do not own this world or anything in it; God, as Creator, owns it all. How we handle money reveals much about the depth of our commitment to Christ. That’s why Jesus often talked about money. One-sixth of the gospels, including one out of every three parables, touches on stewardship. Jesus wasn’t a fundraiser. He dealt with money matters because money matters. For some of us, though, it matters too much (*Our Daily Bread*, August 26, 1993).

### ***2. Believe that the God who created you and redeemed you cares for you and will provide for you.***

A pandemic does not eradicate the promises of God. COVID-19 has not erased the assurance of God’s eternal Word. The coronavirus need not cause a crisis of confidence in God’s ability to solve our problems and provide for our needs. It can lead us to deeper faith, greater trust, and more secure confidence in God. Amid our greatest challenges, God’s promises are still there. I have seen this powerfully demonstrated in my own life. My father became a Seventh-day Adventist when I was 13 years old. As the result of his commitment to keep the Bible Sabbath, he lost his job. In addition to that, Dad made the decision to be faithful in returning his tithe and offerings. To meet the needs of our family, Dad worked three part-time jobs. Life was not easy, but I often remember him quoting two Bible promises. In his quiet, confident manner Dad would first quote. Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the

kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” And then he would add Philippians 4:19: “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Dad’s faithfulness and settled confidence in God gave our entire family the assurance that in our time of trial God would come through, and He did. We may not have had all the luxuries of some families, but we had something worth much more: a father who was faithful to God and who gave us the assurance that we could trust God with the totality of our lives. When times are tough and our finances are limited, trusting God in these trying times is an act of faith. It is saying, “God, I believe You can care for me. I place my life in Your hands. I believe Your promises.” Giving is a tangible expression of our faith.

### ***3. Choose to reorder your priorities in view of the coming of Jesus.***

The Bible makes some remarkable predictions regarding an economic crash during the last days of earth’s history. The greatest treasure we can have is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—the Pearl of Great Price. He offers us abundant joy, inner peace, and lasting satisfaction. The fleeting pleasures of this world are soon to pass away. When our happiness, contentment, and security come from our material possessions, and then the economy suddenly crashes, we are left discouraged, downhearted, and depressed; but when our faith is anchored in Jesus and the eternal treasures of His Word, we are secure. When our happiness is dependent on the amount of money we have, we are chasing a mirage. Money provides only temporary satisfaction and superficial happiness.

#### **Your Family Can Survive Tough Times**

Willie and Elaine Oliver, family life specialists, write, “To be sure, when a family experiences the loss of income, this reality is associated with high levels of anxiety and depression, in addition to other mental health challenges. Sadly, these mental health effects of job loss are not likely to be short-term. Prior studies have discovered significant surges in both adult and youth suicide resulting from economic recessions. In fact, mental health tends to decline significantly, even among those who do not experience family loss of employment, even when the rates of unemployment are much smaller than we are experiencing during this pandemic. Despite the incredible pressure economic crises put on families, there are things parents can do to keep themselves and their children sane during this time of instability and unpredictability. Willie and Elaine Oliver make these practical suggestions:

1. Ask your children what they are thinking about, and simply listen. Even if they say things that may alarm you because they might be true, don’t be alarmed or allow it to show on your face. Your children need a safe place to talk and an opportunity to express their feelings, and it is up to you to provide this space.
2. Set the example you want to be followed in your home. Take care of yourself spiritually, physically, and emotionally by spending time with God, exercising, eating nutritious food, and thinking positive thoughts. Practice being patient and kind, as is written in Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 13:4).

3. Pray with your children on a regular basis. Allow your thoughts to be turned to God, who has promised never to leave you (see Matthew 28:20); to keep you in perfect peace (see Isaiah 26:3); and to provide all your needs (see Philippians 4:19).

### **How to Survive Physically During Tough Times**

On April 20, 2020, the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition published an article on the role of nutrition and our health habits in surviving a pandemic. The authors stated, “At the individual level, the common denominator that drives most of the nutrition and dietary recommendations to combat viral infections, including COVID-19, lies within the link between diet and immunity. In fact, existing evidence highlights that diet has a profound effect on people’s immune system and disease susceptibility.” The article goes on to make these eight recommendations. Consider these recommendations as survival guidelines for any health crisis.

1. Try to eat well-balanced meals.
2. Avoid irregular snacking.
3. Choose food rich in vitamins A, C, E, B6, B12, zinc, and iron, such as citrus fruits, dark-green leafy vegetables, nuts, and dairy products.
4. Maintain a healthy lifestyle of exercise at home.
5. Get adequate sleep.
6. Spend time meditating.
7. Avoid smoking, alcohol, and drugs.
8. Don’t buy into quack or unscientific miracle cures.

God’s intention for you is to both survive and thrive during times of crisis. As we make positive choices, our immune systems will strengthen and our health will improve. It is never too late to begin making the best possible health choices for ourselves and our families.

### **How to Survive Emotionally During Tough Times**

Worry and anxiety have gripped millions of people. They are afraid that the coronavirus or some other disease may strike them next. They heard about the rising death toll and trembled with fear. They were concerned about their children or grandchildren or elderly parents, and many of them still are. Or possibly it’s financial fear. Many people are worried that they may not be able to pay their rent or their mortgage. They are concerned about a business that has closed, and are fearful they will not have a job when this pandemic is over. For some it is even more dire—they are concerned about how to feed their families. They are on edge filled with uncertainty about the future. The answer to crippling fear is trust in God’s love, care, and provisions for us. The Word of God provides real-life examples of God’s people in crisis and how they developed deeper trust in trying times. These biblical stories reveal eternal principles that are faith building. They were written in another time and another place, but they speak to us at this time and in this place. They were written centuries ago, but speak with relevance in the twenty-first century to a world devastated by a devastating, death-dealing pandemic.

### **God Is Still in Control in Times of Crisis**

Judah faced a crisis. Devastation and death were at its door. Catastrophe seemed certain. The nation's inhabitants were paralyzed by fear. An enemy invader was approaching, and there seemed little they could do about it. They were helpless and hopeless. At the time of this catastrophe, Isaiah writes, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). In the midst of a crisis heaven's throne is not vacant. God reassured His people that He was still in control. He was still sovereign. The crisis did not catch God by surprise. God has not left us alone in times of our greatest trials. Pandemics rage, but God is still on His throne. An enemy invader, COVID-19, ravaged the land, but in these trying times we can learn lessons of trust. When fear gives way to trust, peace floods into our lives. Isaiah the prophet reassured God's people with a powerful promise. His message comes echoing and reechoing down the corridors of time: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever" (Isaiah 26:3, 4). The simple key to surviving any crisis we face is trust—believing that the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of this world, and our living Lord, loves us and cares for us no matter what we are facing or ever will face. When disease ravages our land, when our bodies are racked with fever, when life seems to be falling apart, we can still trust. We can trust that through His Holy Spirit, God is with us. He is strengthening us, encouraging us, supporting us, giving us hope of a better tomorrow, pointing us to the day when sickness, suffering, and heartache will be no more.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How possible is it to survive when the economy of the world collapses? Give insights.
2. Explain to a family who has recently accepted the Adventist message and is facing tough and difficult challenges the possibility of trusting God in troubled times.
3. How can we hopefully face the world when its economy collapses?

### **PRAYER POINTS**

1. God to renew our strength in the midst of this troubled times.
2. God to help us repose total trust and confidence in Him as we face the collapsed economy.
3. God to continue to provide for His people in this difficult times.



## CHAPTER 8

### A PLACE OF ETERNAL SECURITY; FOR THE FAMILY

#### KEY BIBLE TEXT: JOSHUA 20:9

#### Seeking Safety in world that lacks Security

A place for security and refuge in a world, filled with danger, risk, and jeopardy, has become one of the most sought after global commodity.

During national elections, political aspirants promise to offer their nations, security and peace. World's greatest political leaders extensively discuss security matters. Yet, it seems security and safety are fast becoming things of the past in our planet.

At times, people migrate from nation to nation in search of refuge. Refugee camps across the globe continue to flood with those who sought asylum for years, as unrest and violence increase in the world. The question is, can we really find rest and refuge in this world? If yes, where?

#### Refuge Cities in Ancient Israel; and our Refuge in Christ

As believers in Christ, we seek for security. An imaginary story of life during the ancient days of Israel was told by Mark Finley in his book "Hope in Troubled Times" about two Israelites Ehud and Eli, in the story, Ehud accidentally flung his axe while fetching fire wood, killing his friend Eli. He consequently, fled to the city of refuge to save his dear life. This story perfectly illustrate our relationship to the heavenly sanctuary, how we can access it to seek for refuge through prayers to Jesus our High Priest.

As city of refuge served for a place of safety for those who accidentally kill their brothers, so does the heavenly sanctuary, especially, when we sin either by omission or by accident.

The Bible says the following concerning the ancient Israel's cities of refuge, thus:

"These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation." (NKJ Joshua 20:9)

After several conquests the Children of Israel chose and designated six out of forty eight cities giving to the Levites as 'cities of refuge' (Numbers 35:6-15).

The six 'cities of refuge' were *Kedesh* in Galilee, in the territory of Naphtali *Shechem* in the hill country of the tribe of Ephraim *Hebron (Kiriath Arba)* in the territory of Judah To the east of the Jordan: (see also Deuteronomy 4:43) *Bezer* in the territory of the tribe of Reuben *Ramoth* in Gilead, in the territory of Gad *Golan* in Bashan, in the territory of Manasseh.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on these cities of refuge, Ellen White states, Patriarchs and Prophets: "he who fled to city refuge could make no delay" (p. 517)

In other words, families, weariness and difficulties were forgotten as the offender hurriedly runs to save his life.

This should inform us about how resolute we should make our running to Jesus with our sins lest we be destroyed by them.

Furthermore, Ellen White, gave a vivid comparison between the cities of refuge and the sinners' refuge in Christ, thus, she said:

“The cities of refuge appointed for God's ancient people were a symbol of the refuge provided in Christ. The same merciful Savior who appointed those temporal cities of refuge has by the shedding of His own blood provided for the transgressors of God's law a sure retreat, into which they may flee for safety from the second death. No power can take out of His hands the souls that go to Him for pardon.” {PP 516.3}

Apostle Paul confirms this new place of our refuge when he wrote such encouraging words, thus:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (NKJ Hebrews 4:14-18)

*For Paul*, “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (KJV Romans 8:1)

Faith helps us to enter with Jesus, our high priest, into the sanctuary in heaven. By faith too, we can dwell in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Also by faith families, here on earth can individually find the heavenly sanctuary as a place of refuge and security. The Psalmist says: “God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

Another story of an American soldier who lost his father and brother in war-front during American civil war and decided to see the country's president to permit him go home and take care of his mother. As he approached the white house gate, the presidential guard stopped him. Disappointed and wearied, he got frustrated and went back discouraged. Abraham Lincoln's little son, Tad showed up and took him by the hand and they were able to pass through all the guards without being harassed, until he finally met with the president.

Can compared to Christ's readiness to take us by hand through ever ascending prayer of the saints to His Father and our God. Like the little son of Abraham Lincoln, Jesus has immediate access to His father and His is ready to take us by the hand and lead us into God's presence.

By looking to Jesus we can find refuge in the heavenly places before the Father. By faith we can enter with Jesus, our heavenly High Priest, into the sanctuary on high.

By faith we can soar into eternity and dwell in heavenly places in Christ. A song writer writes in Seventh - day Adventist Hymnal, number 412, “Look upon Jesus sinless is He; Father, impute His life unto me. My life of scarlet, my sin and woe, Cover with His life, whiter than snow”

### **The Sabbath Rest; A Place of Safety**

This rest which is found in Jesus extends in a special sense to Sabbath rest. The Sabbath offers rest in a hectic world.

It may interest you to recognize that the Sabbath day originated with God at creation and was invented by God as uniting factor between God and the Children of men (Gen. 2:2,3;Exod. 31:17).

On the other hand, the Sabbath is a divine command (Exodus 20:8-11). Rest, on the Sabbath day is part of God's restoration plan to save mankind. It offers peace, security and rest in this chaotic world. Meaning, we need the Sabbath rest in a busy world like this. The Sabbath is a reminder of who was created and who created. God says, "Remember the Sabbath day" because, He knows to forget is to forget God the Creator. Thus, became a memorial of creation and a reminder of redemption.

The Sabbath calls us from the things of time to the things of eternity. The Sabbath reminds us that we are not merely skin covering bones.

Prophet Isaiah talks about a time when God will make the "new heavens and the new earth." He says, "It shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the Lord" (Isaiah 66:22, 23).

This means, every Sabbath in the earth made new we will enter the joy of worship with the entire universe. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will lead us in a symphony of praise in New Jerusalem's city of refuge. There we will be secure forever. The New Jerusalem: The Ultimate City of Refuge God can encourage us in remarkable ways when we are experiencing trials.

Upon every Sabbath in the earth made new, we will enter the joy of worship with the entire universe. What a blessing it will be. A moment of happy reunion. When love reigns supreme forever.

The Sabbath is God's way of calling us to rest from our labors of this life. It offers divine peace and safety. Besides, the Sabbath and family were born the same week at the Garden of Israel. As Jesus poured His life on the cross, he is still saying "If you love me my Commandments. Besides, the Sabbath rest offers our stressful, over-wearied mortal bodies a weekly dose of rest refuge, which has been confirmed as a sure antidote for many stress related diseases.

The Sabbath should be for us, His city of refuge in this world of troubles, where distress, strife, tensions and stress occur on daily basis.

### **The New Jerusalem; A Place of Safety**

The apostle John was exiled on the rocky, barren isle of Patmos off the coast of Greece. Imagine his loneliness. He was separated from his family, friends, and Christian brothers and sisters. Loneliness often leads to discouragement. But John was not alone. Day by day he spent time with Jesus in prayer and meditation. Then one day the glory of God overwhelmed Him. The angel of the Lord descended from heaven and revealed the future in amazing symbols of prophetic imagery.

These prophetic revelations reveal that God is in control of the destiny of this planet. The book of Revelation climaxes with the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven to earth. The truth is that deep within our hearts we long for security. We long for a better world, where heartache sorrow and pain are over. The New Jerusalem is our final safe haven. It is God's eternal city of refuge.

Here in the presence of Jesus we will be eternally secure. Writing about this city, the apostle John says, *"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them,*

*and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed 94 Hope for Troubled Times away' ” (Revelation 21:1-4).*

The apostle saw the final events in the great battle between good and evil. Wickedness, evil, and sin will be finally and fully destroyed. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, will descend from heaven. Planet Earth, which has been so consumed with conflict, strife, war, natural disasters, crime, sickness, and disease, will be made new again. The earth will be created in Edenic splendor. This planet in rebellion will become the center of God’s new world. The tabernacle of God, the very dwelling place of God, will reside in the earth made new.

God will dwell with His people. Love will reign. Joy will fill our hearts. Disease, disaster, and death will be gone forever. One day wickedness will give way to righteousness. One day war will surrender to peace. One day sickness will be eradicated, and our bodies will flourish in abundant health. One day evil will be defeated, and goodness will reign. One day poverty will give way to plenty. One day the devil will be finally destroyed, and Jesus will be Lord of all and King of kings.

Apostle Paul scathed the same vision and said; “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” (NKJ Titus 2:13). Jesus invites you to come. Immediate Access to the Father: The central message of Jesus’ high-priestly ministry in heaven’s sanctuary is that through Him we have access to the Father. We have access to the Father because of Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 adds, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Suggested Hymns: SDAH 412; 422; 432

### **Discussion Questions**

19. Do you have a time you feel unsecured; what did you do?
20. Do you long for a safe place—a place of refuge and security?
21. Have you experienced the benefits of Sabbath rest in your life, if not, would you wish to do so?

### **Prayer points:**

5. God grant us safety and refuge in Jesus.
6. God help our family members take refuge in you.
7. God help to understand the benefits of Sabbath rest to our families in a hectic world?

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i <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/27> - Accessed March 12, 20