

# BEYOND TODAY

A Magazine of Understanding

July-August 2020

## Hope and Help for the **Brokenhearted**

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# A Taste of Chaos to Come



Scott Ashley  
Managing editor

The cover of the January-February 2020 issue of this magazine asked, “The 2020s Are Here: Are You Ready?” We thought this would be a troubling year, but we had no idea *how* troubling it would be. It now seems that rather than a new year, we started a *new age*—an age of chaos.

It started with news of devastating locust plagues, where swarms of billions of locusts dozens of miles across swept into large areas across India and Pakistan, the Middle East and into Africa—areas that could ill afford huge losses of cropland and other vegetation.

That plague had barely made the headlines (it’s now in its second, even more destructive wave) before a plague of a different sort—Covid-19—came to dominate the news for several months. This virus-caused disease has taken several hundred thousand lives and thrown the entire world economy into a tailspin.

As if the thousands of pandemic deaths and hospitalizations weren’t enough, governments and political leaders claimed sweeping new powers over virtually every aspect of citizens’ lives, trampling on many rights enshrined in national constitutions—and in the process bringing what is proving to be even more deaths and economic destruction that could’ve been avoided.

And now another plague is dominating the headlines. Unlike the natural plagues of locusts and coronavirus, this one is entirely *human*-caused—a plague of social unrest and breakdown of law and order such as hasn’t been seen in decades.

Yes, this certainly looks like an age of chaos! The subtitle of *Beyond Today* is “A Magazine of Understanding.” Some may view that claim as presumptuous. We view it as a statement of humility. Why? Because of the *source* of our understanding. And that source is the Bible, God’s Word, the revelation of our Creator. So it’s not *our* understanding, it’s *God’s* understanding. And that’s what we share with our readers—*God’s* perspective on the trends affecting our world.

Have we been *surprised* by these plagues? Not really, because they’ve been foretold in the pages of the Bible for thousands of years. Have we been surprised by the *timing* of these events? Admittedly yes, because we expected other things first and in a different way. And we still expect those things. It just appears that God is giving us a taste—a wakeup call—to get our attention and warn us of what lies ahead.

Asked about the prophetic indicators of His coming, Jesus Christ responded that “there will be *famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places*” (Matthew 24:7, emphasis added throughout). Locusts, with their ability to eat their own body weight in plant matter every day and multiply more than tenfold from one generation to the next, have long been a harbinger of famine. Huge swarms can strip bare huge fields of crops

in just minutes, leaving nothing but shredded stalks and twigs.

Widespread pestilences—disease epidemics—have until recently been largely thought of as troubles from the past. But a worldwide pandemic like Covid-19 has shown how fragile our assumptions can be. So far, ironically, the advanced Western nations have been among those hardest hit. And although it’s largely been pushed out of the headlines, this pandemic continues its march across the globe.

And what about this latest plague hitting the headlines, the wave of social unrest and breakdown of order that in just a few days spread like wildfire across the United States and then to much of the rest of the world?

In Matthew 24:7, before mentioning famines and pestilences, Jesus foretold something else: “For *nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . .*”

“Nation” here is the Greek word *ethnos*, from which we get the English words *ethnic* and *ethnicity*, referring to racial

or cultural subgroups of people. “Kingdom” is the Greek word *basileia*, the equivalent of a political national entity today.

So Jesus warned that in the time leading up to His return, we would see “wars and rumors of wars” (verse 6)—shown here including not just conflict and wars between nations, but also unrest and conflict between different cultural and ethnic groups. *Many peoples will be set against one another.* These trends “are *the beginning of sorrows,*” Jesus said (verse 8).

He also foretold that “*lawlessness will abound*” (verse 12). While this specifically refers to God’s holy law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, it also refers in a general sense to humanity’s growing rebelliousness and violence similar to Noah’s day (verses 37-39), when mankind’s corruption had reached the point that God cleansed the earth of the entire human race with the exception of Noah’s family.

This should not be surprising, considering the way God describes our human condition in Isaiah 59:8: “*The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths*” (English Standard Version).

A time of judgment and justice *is coming* on us. And to be clear, we are *not* saying we are now experiencing the fulfillment of these prophecies. But we *are* saying this could well be a foretaste, a wakeup call, of *far worse* things to come.

We go into this in greater detail in several articles in this issue. In the meantime, why not *do what God tells us to do*? He offers us astounding hope in times of chaos such as this. Listen and pay attention—you have much to gain. And those who don’t heed have much to lose! **BT**



Rioting aftermath in Minneapolis, May 28.

# Hope and Help for the Brokenhearted

With the Covid-19 pandemic and a host of global problems plaguing the world, it's no surprise that anxiety and depression are rampant. Some even look for a way out in suicide. Yet all is not lost; we can have real hope for tomorrow. But we must look in the right place to find that true source of hope!

by Peter Eddington

**I**'m stressed. I hate my life—absolutely hate it. There is no joy, no happiness, no hope, no peace—just misery. I want to know from God what His plans are for me. I'm asking because I'm tired of this. I am not one to give up, but life has found a way to beat me down to the core. If this is what life is about, I no longer want a part of it. Are we born to die unhappy?"

This is the gist of an email we at *Beyond Today* received. The person is desperately asking for help. Sadly, we've received many such pleas for help from people wishing to end their lives. Filled with depression, hopelessness and inner pain, they are reaching out for answers and hope.

And you can be sure that if you're not personally suffering in this way, someone you know probably is—whether among your family or friends or others in your workplace or church congregation.

Let's consider the scope of this problem and what can be done about it. Thankfully, the Word of God does provide guidance and help in facing anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide—much-needed help and encouragement for the brokenhearted.

## Rising suicides as depression grows

According to the World Health Organization, close to 800,000 people die by suicide every year. For every suicide there are many more people who *attempt* suicide. It is the third-leading cause of death in 15- to 19-year-olds. Nearly 80 percent of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries.

And now, with the global Covid-19 pandemic, rates of

depression and suicide are worsening. An April 3, 2020, headline at the *Scientific American* website reported: "COVID-19 Is Likely to Lead to an Increase in Suicides. The psychosocial repercussions of this crisis could make the tragedy even worse."

In 2018, more than 48,000 Americans died by suicide and more than 1.4 million adults attempted it, according to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The same report noted that suicide is the 10th-leading cause of death in the United States.

The U.S. National Suicide Prevention Hotline is currently accessible by the 10-digit number 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). Last year, counselors answered more than 2 million calls and more than 100,000 online chat requests. Local crisis lines received another *14 million* calls.

For U.S. adults ages 18 to 65, suicide is the fourth-leading cause of death. For those 18 to 24, it ranks third, while for college students it's the second-highest.

Shockingly, suicide among *children* is increasing at an alarming rate. The National Mental Health Association reports that among children ages 5 to 15, suicide is the sixth-leading cause of death. Your own kids and their friends may struggle with this!

The Federal Communications Commission is moving ahead with plans to implement a three-digit number—988—to reach the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, streamlining access to crisis services across the country.

## So what's behind this?

Suicide can be the end result of financial reverse, romantic failure, childlessness or the discovery of terminal illness, but

the majority of suicide deaths trace back to one major reason—*deep, debilitating depression*.

Depression is serious, long-lasting despondency and feelings of hopelessness—not just discouragement, sorrow or having the “blues.” Estimates are that one in 10 Americans suffers from chronic depression. The worst forms of clinical depression consume their victims, making them unable to face each new day.

And this was *before* the recent onslaught of coronavirus. Rodrigo Pérez Ortega wrote on the *Science* magazine website April 22, 2020 that “New surveys of doctors and nurses in China, Italy, and the United States suggest they are experiencing a plethora of mental health problems as COVID-19 continues its spread, including higher rates of stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia.”

Sadly, attitudes about depression keep many who suffer from ever seeking help. U.S. National Mental Health Association figures show that more than half of Americans think depression is a personal weakness, a sign of failure. Despite years of TV bombardment about depression remedies, four out of five suffering from depression do not seek treatment. The primary reason? *They are too embarrassed to seek help.*

For men, the concern is often that people will think they are

life has afflicted people of every nation, culture, religion and governmental system throughout history.

American clinical psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison points out: “No one knows who was the first to slash his throat with a piece of flint, take a handful of poison berries, or intentionally drop his spear to the ground in battle. Nor do we know who first jumped impulsively, or after thought, from a great cliff; walked without food into an ice storm; or stepped into the sea with no intention of coming back” (*Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, 2000, p. 11).

The Bible relates examples of people suffering depression to the point of wanting their lives to end. It shows that severe depression and related emotional problems can afflict anyone—both those who don’t follow God and those who do.

Probably the most famous example in the Bible of suffering depressing and wanting to die is that of the patriarch Job. God allowed Satan to afflict this righteous man with the loss of his family and virtually everything he owned, and then to attack his body with painful boils.

Job, who didn’t know what was going on, was devastated. He lamented: “May the day perish on which I was born, and the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived.’ May that day be darkness; may God above not seek it, nor the light shine upon it . . . Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, *who long for death*, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are *glad when they can find the grave?*” (Job 3:3-4, 20-22, emphasis added throughout).

In his misery Job *longed for death*. Long-term suffering without hope drives many to despair and the desire to end it all.

Others have confronted similar hopelessness.

Consider the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. She was one of two wives of the same man, Elkanah. The other wife, Peninnah, had children and arrogantly ridiculed Hannah, who was unable to conceive.

As the account tells us, Elkanah “went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh . . . And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her

Depression certainly affected godly people in the Bible. Yet *they kept going—trusting in God who helped them. And He will help us too!*

*not masculine enough*, so they don’t seek help. Emotions are seen as a feminine characteristic, despite being common to all.

Depression claims victims from every social strata, every IQ and every religion. Fame and fortune are no antidotes for the urge to kill oneself. Suicides of the rich and famous make a very long list. Many Hollywood stars have died by their own hand.

Severe depression strikes everywhere, and it’s a big killer.

### An age-old problem

While the pressures of modern life have accelerated their frequency, anxiety, depression and suicide also took their toll in ancient times. The overwhelming urge to take one’s own

## Where Do I Get Help?

### Suicide:

Most countries have hotlines and support groups for those suffering from severe depression or contemplating suicide.

In the United States and Canada, lifeline assistance is just a moment away at 1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273-TALK). This National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In Australia, Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services. You can reach them at 13 11 14.

For other countries, the I.A.S.P., the International Association for Suicide Prevention, has a website giving hotline and crisis intervention phone numbers across the globe. You can visit them online at [iasp.info/resources/Crisis\\_Centres](http://iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres).

### Depression:

Sometimes severe depression becomes debilitating and can be life-threatening. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has detailed information that can help a person overcome depression and suicidal thoughts. Visit their website at [psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression](http://psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression).

Seeking competent medical advice from a reputable doctor who specializes in depression is very important. Remember, a very high percentage of those who seek professional counseling for depression are able to overcome it or manage it quite successfully.

sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival also provoked her severely, *to make her miserable*, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore *she [Hannah] wept and did not eat*" (verses 1-7).

Then one year when they had gone to worship at the tabernacle, "*she was in bitterness of soul*, and prayed to the LORD and *wept in anguish*" (verse 10). Hannah was indeed very depressed. We know this story eventually has a happy ending, with the birth of her son Samuel. But not all do.

### More biblical examples of depression

Later in the same book we see the sad reign of Saul, the first king of Israel. He started out well enough—tall, handsome and from a good family. It would seem he had everything going for him. But a series of bad decisions rooted in his pride and a wrong attitude took their toll, and before long Saul sank into the depths of depression.

We're told in 1 Samuel 16: "But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him. [The departure of God's Spirit left Saul in a distressing mental and emotional state.] And Saul's servants said to him, 'Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you. Let our master now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well.'

"So Saul said to his servants, 'Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me.' [David, who would later be king, was chosen.] . . . And so it was, whenever the [distressing] spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him" (verses 14-17, 23).

Saul's disobedience to God led to his being rejected by God. The departure of God's Spirit left him in a terrible spiritual, mental and emotional state. God's Holy Spirit helps people to maintain a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Without it

our mind is incomplete. From the beginning, Saul was a man who exhibited weakness in his character, such as needing the approval of men. The removal of God's Spirit of course made things worse.

Some of God's own prophets went through very low periods, to the point of wishing they were dead. Elijah is perhaps the best known. He carried God's judgments and warnings to several Israelite kings, including the despot Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel.

A high point of Elijah's life came when God used him to overthrow the 450 idolatrous prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. This proved not only the power of God but the utter lack of power of the hundreds of pagan prophets. It seems Elijah should have been on top of the world, but he soon sank into the depths of depression after threats from Jezebel:

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah

The apostle Paul's example shows that anxiety and depression come not so much from *what* happens to us as they do from *our perspective about* what happens to us.

had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.'

"And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed *that he might die*, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, *take my life*, for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1 Kings 19:1-4).

Elijah was physically and mentally exhausted, but he also needed to learn a lesson about God's power and presence, as is found later in the story.

The Bible records other examples. The prophet Jonah suffered frustration, resentment and discouragement over God's decision not to destroy Nineveh, capital of the Assyrians who were Israel's mortal enemies, when they repented in response to his preaching. "And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the

sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he *wished death for himself*, and said, '*It is better for me to die than to live*'" (Jonah 4:8).

### Holding on to God's promises

But there are also biblical examples of a different approach. The apostle Paul experienced many episodes of great suffering, but he had a wonderful way of helping people focus ahead. He *pointed people to God the Father and Jesus Christ* for strength during trials.

As he wrote: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended [to have taken hold of what Christians ultimately strive for, perfection in God's Kingdom]; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:13-14).

While not easy for us to do when severely depressed, Paul shows the importance of *always staying Christ-centered and focused on the goal of God's Kingdom*. His epistles are filled with uplifting encouragement for others.

Here is another example: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory which shall be revealed in us*. For the earnest expectation of the creation *eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God*" (Romans 8:18-19).

To be glorified children—divine sons and daughters—in God's family, in His Kingdom, is our destiny. And the apostle Paul clung to that encouragement. Paul's writings have given great comfort, encouragement and inspiration to countless people over the ages. They can for you too. Paul's example shows that anxiety and depression come not so much from *what* happens to us as they do from *our perspective and attitudes about* what happens to us.

Now that's easy to say, but it can be hard to believe if you're the one severely depressed! If you're the person who has lost it all due to the Covid-19 lockdown—

either financially or had loved ones succumb to the virus—the pressure may be unbearable.

Clearly, depression can also affect godly people. We see how it affected Job, Hannah, Elijah, Jonah and others. It's not necessarily a character flaw or a sin that brings it on. Many of God's servants went through low periods in their lives and sometimes even expressed a desire to die.

However, here is a very important point: Although they may have wanted God to end their lives, *they kept going, striving to remain faithful*. And as with all God's servants in Scripture, we must also learn to hold on—to endure even when it seems we can't. We do this through *trusting in God*, who will help us.

The teachings of the Bible are where we find hope and encouragement. And what we present here in *Beyond Today* magazine highlights and expounds on that hope.

Here is a letter we received from a reader in Ireland: "I have left [a particular religious group], finding so many contradictions in their Bible teaching. I am looking and watching your TV programme. I live in Dublin, Ireland, and you haven't a church near me. I am living alone. My two best friends died this year. Two years ago my niece committed suicide. I am so lonely. *I find comfort in your teaching*. Thank you so much for your help."

I point this out to show what *we all can do together* as people of God—like the apostle Paul and Christ's other followers—provide understanding, help and comfort from the teachings of our Father in heaven through Christ. We can offer help to others in a hopeless and overwhelmed state of mind. There is a wonderful future ahead!

Now if we ourselves are depressed, we must be sure to seek help, not letting embarrassment hold us back. We need to pray to God and talk to someone else, a friend or a counselor, who can help us or point us where to turn for help. Of course, the biggest help is God.

(For specific guidance on immediate action to take if you sense someone is contemplating suicide, read "He's Suicidal—What Can I Do?" And if you are suicidal yourself, please seek help now. Read "Where Do I Get Help?" on page 5.)

### Is suicide wrong?

The Sixth Commandment tells us, "You shall not murder." God alone gives life,

## "He's Suicidal—What Can I Do?"

When suicide takes a family member or friend, the common reaction is to ask, "What could I have done?" Family members agonize, playing over and over in their minds the last few days and weeks with their loved one, wondering what they could have done differently.

As Kay Redfield Jamison puts it in her heralded study on suicide, *Night Falls Fast*: "Suicide is a death like no other, and those left behind to struggle with it must confront a pain like no other. They are left with the shock and the unending 'what ifs' . . . They are left to a bank of questions from others . . . mostly about why? They are left to the silence of others who are horrified, embarrassed, or otherwise unable to cobble together a note of condolence, an embrace, or a comment; and they are left with the assumption . . . that more could have been done" (p. 292).

Since those with suicidal thoughts often refuse to seek help, mental health experts point out the crucial need for intervention on the part of family and friends. They have to watch for signs of suicidal behavior and seek help, such as mental health professionals and suicide prevention centers, on behalf of those tormented.

The good news is that nearly *eight out of 10 patients* with depressive illness *will improve through treatment*, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. And if the patient is receptive to learning what the Bible has to say, he or she will likely experience significant help from learning what it truly teaches.

If someone is threatening suicide, take steps to calm the individual and get trained suicide prevention experts involved as soon as possible. Two respected groups, the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association, a Chicago-based support group, and the Mayo Clinic, make the following recommendations:

- Take suicide threats seriously.
- Involve other people, especially if someone is threatening imminent suicide. Call 911 or the suicide hotline [soon to be 988].
- If the person has sought professional help, contact his or her therapist, psychiatrist, crisis intervention team or others who are already familiar with the case.
- Question the person about his or her suicidal thoughts. Be direct—ask if the person has a specific plan for suicide.
- Reassure the person that the problem can be helped. Remind him or her that help is available and things will get better.
- Don't promise confidentiality, because you may need to speak to the person's doctor to protect him or her. Don't make promises that would endanger the person's life.
- Avoid leaving the person alone until you can be sure he or she is in the hands of competent professionals.

The goal is immediate intervention—actions to prevent an impending disaster. But a long-term objective is also important. Having a purpose in life is perhaps the strongest antidote to feelings of hopelessness and despondency.

While not easy to do when severely depressed, remember the apostle Paul shows the importance of *staying Christ-centered* and focused on our final destination, *on the goal of God's Kingdom*.

And this can't be overemphasized: If you think the person is suicidal based on the way he is talking or acting, you need professional help to handle the situation. Get that help as quickly as possible.

Parents of high school or college students who show signs of depression need to discuss these matters openly and matter-of-factly. Parents should encourage their children to feel comfortable in discussing their depression or suicidal feelings and seeking help.

Applying these commonsense recommendations can make a big difference in the life of someone you love. Don't ignore the problem and just hope it will go away!

and it is His alone to take. While we hurt with those who are hurting and despondent, no scripture in the Bible condones suicide.

That said, we should not be quick to judge and condemn people who take their own lives, as many do. While wrong, suicide is often a complex matter. We should avoid the tendency to oversimplify this tragic type of death. Individuals who commit suicide often have been struggling with serious problems such as those described earlier. But taking one's life isn't the right way to deal with any trial. As is often said, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

The reality is that severe depression, often compounded by other problems and disappointments, can drive a person to suicide. The mental agony that accompanies clinical depression, or a period of prolonged discouragement, can make suicide seem attractive because the sufferer expects his suffering to end at death.

### The hope of the resurrection

But that is not the answer, for it is *not the end of the story*. Those who die will live again. Those who belong to God the Father, who have the Holy Spirit within them at death, will be resurrected to eternal life at Jesus' return (Romans 8:11).

And there is still more to come. God greatly desires that all people who have lived, or will live, be in His family if they are willing (2 Peter 3:9).

Those who die in Christ will be in the resurrection at His return, called "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5-6. But there is another category—those who died without first being truly converted. Some of these may have believed themselves to be Christians but really weren't, not having proper understanding and never having made full spiritual commitment to God. They and all who lived and died without a genuine opportunity to be saved will later also be raised to live again among "the rest of the dead" (verse 5), now with the opportunity to live a godly life and be offered salvation.

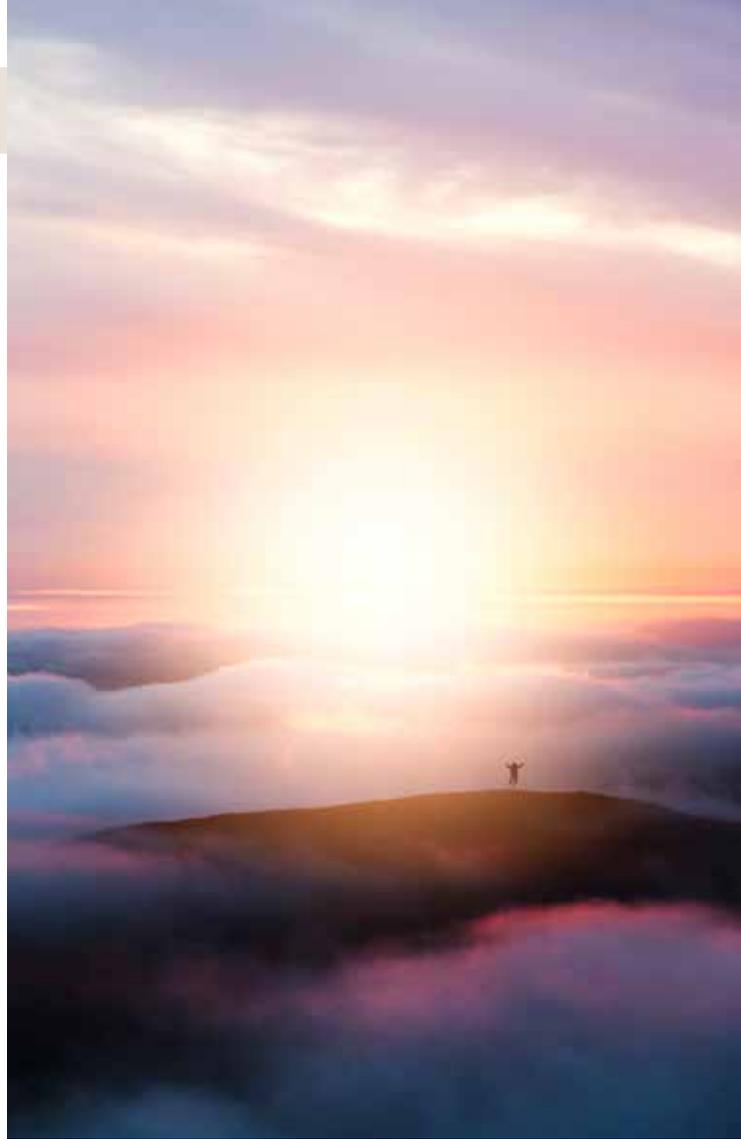
The Bible reveals that all who died without being truly converted to Christ's way of life (suicide victims included) will still have their opportunity for salvation. This will be after Jesus Christ has returned to earth and is ruling the world (to learn more about this biblical truth, read "How Eternal Life Will Ultimately Be Offered to All" in our free study guide *What Happens After Death?*).

But suicide is not an escape or quick solution to one's problems. When resurrected, those who've taken their own lives will still likely have psychological issues to work out. They will still have to deal with their problems, and now with the addition of having to face up to a terrible wrong and the suffering they inflicted on others by that.

Thankfully, God's desire is for them to turn to Him and be saved. But the things people do in this life will still have consequences in the sense of having to come to terms with them. This could be quite hard, so *no one* should think of suicide as some kind of *golden ticket* to the good life of the future. *It is not.*

### Healing today and in the brightest tomorrow

Jesus Christ said He came to heal the brokenhearted and



For those who are suffering now, and those we've lost to tragedy, there is light ahead. *The brightest day ever is coming, with no more death, sorrow, crying or pain.*

release those suffering from oppression, which includes the crushing weight of depression.

We read this about Jesus in Luke 4:16-21: "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

"Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

He did this through His miracles and teachings during His ministry at His first coming. And He continues this work through His people today—even living in them through the

Holy Spirit to give them spiritual power. But this work has yet to be completed. It will be ultimately fulfilled following Jesus' second coming—especially after the raising to life of all who never really had the opportunity to receive God's salvation in this age.

Knowing this should be very comforting to the loved ones of a person who has died by suicide.

We find this promise also in Psalm 147: "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful . . . He *heals the brokenhearted* and binds up their wounds" (verses 1, 3).

God the Father and Jesus Christ have not forgotten anyone. The brokenhearted, including those who've contemplated suicide or even committed it, will ultimately be healed. And here is how the story ends:

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . 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" (Revelation 21:1, 4).

We look forward to that time of awesome healing and restoration. For those who are suffering now, whether in depression and contemplating suicide or in coping with a loved one having been lost to this or some other horrible tragedy, there is light ahead. The brightest day ever is coming, with no more death, sorrow, crying or pain.

But we don't have to wait until then for help from God. He will bless our lives tremendously today if we respond to Him as we need to. Jesus said He came to bring us abundant life (John 10:10). He also said there are none who forsake their old lives to follow Him "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time [in all manner of blessings] . . . and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

Yet He didn't say it would all be easy. Indeed, we've seen how a number of God's servants in Scripture struggled with depression. Many have been persecuted, and some even martyred. The key to persevering is to keep turning to God and to others for help and encouragement, with continued focus on the wonderful future that lies ahead.

Here is a meme that has been popular on Facebook: "If you rearrange the letters in 'depression,' you'll get 'I pressed on.' Your current situation is not your final destination." So true! We must keep our eyes on God's plan for us.

And always remember, *you're not alone*. God will help you—and He gives us others who will help us too. Receive that help, and be a light to others in darkness. And know that the ultimate dawn is coming.

Yes, Jesus Christ was sent to *heal the brokenhearted*, to help the depressed, to save the suicidal. May we all continue to pray, "Your Kingdom come"! **BT**

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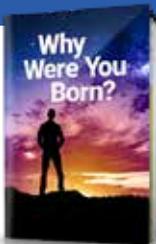
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# Are You Worn Down by Weariness?

Do you feel tired, worn down, weary? If so, you're not alone. The struggles of life can and do grind us down. What can we do to win against weariness?

by Terri Eddington

**T**he mind, heart and body suffer tremendously under the duration of ongoing uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Amid the crises of the last few months, our world has been held captive with varying degrees of these stresses. Covid-19, financial devastation, rioting, social unrest—it all takes a toll. No country, culture, language or society has escaped the barrage of distressing news that confronts us. Is it any wonder we suffer ailment of body, heart and mind?

Seemingly never-ending and difficult circumstances come in many forms and packages, but they are the same in their ability to wreak havoc on the human body and psyche. For some it may be the pain of the loss of a beloved one that shatters their heart. For others it may be an ongoing relationship issue that devastates one's spirit, family difficulties that destroy once-held dreams and expectations, a hidden sin that corrodes one's very core, loneliness that drains one's soul, a broken marriage that crushes one's trust in another, financial difficulty that suffocates peace of mind, caregiving and its accompanying compassion fatigue, or a chronic illness that erodes one's resolve—the list goes on and on.

Have you ever struggled with wanting to just give up through the sheer weariness of it all? Do the following words resonate with some of the lowest moments in your life? *"I am worn out with sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with tears."* If so, you are not alone. Those are the words of King David found in Psalm 6:6 (New Living Translation).

I myself have walked down this dark path due to a lengthy chronic illness. And though my walk through the valley of weariness may have its roots from a different source than that of others, and others most certainly have faced greater challenges, the difficulties we each face are both unique and similar in their ability to wear us down. Perhaps sharing a few simple tools that I've found helpful will toss a lifeline to those who relate—and give understanding and perspective to those who yet don't.

## Lesson 1: Name your blessings directly to God

When we are weary, we're often in such a state of body and mind that it's difficult to even recall in the smallest of ways what lifts our hearts. At some point during my illness I decided to keep a simple two-part daily gratitude journal, which I've chalked up to divine inspiration. God knew what I needed to do.

Part A focuses on taking the time to each day identify even the most seemingly basic blessing from above, and writing it

down in one sentence that begins with, *"Today I am thankful for . . ."*

In spite of the physical challenges of being both blind and deaf, Helen Keller evidently came to understand the principle here, putting it like this: "I thank God for my handicaps, for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God."

Psalm 118:1 says, "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good." This passage by King David is repeated multiple times throughout the Psalms, so this focused gratitude principle must have worked well for him too.

Part B in daily journaling I titled *"Creation Field Notes."* The focus here is to take time to meditate on and tune into what you are seeing around you—to specifically identify elements of God's creation that we so often take for granted, and then praise Him for it.

The exercise of part A fed my heart with gratitude, and I learned that thankfulness is a powerful antidote to weariness. The exercise of part B fed my brain with awe of our great God who planned His creation to include both breathtaking beauty and astonishing detail, including our makeup as humankind.

I also learned that focusing on God's creation and the Creator changes our perspective about ourselves. I find it interesting that in Job 37-39, God spends 95 verses teaching Job about His creation during the time of Job's deep suffering.

It's also evident that this tool was used by King David, a man who suffered loss, anxiety, fears, loneliness, family trials and relationship issues. Psalm 104 is a beautiful example of this, and is an inspiring passage to read again and again. David wrote many, many psalms meditating on, praising and acknowledging God and His creation, often during or after his most difficult trials. "I will meditate on Your majestic, glorious splendor and Your wonderful miracles" (Psalm 145:5, NLT).

## Lesson 2: Think this, not that

In the midst of weariness, when the mind and body feel sucked dry, it's easy for self-destructive thoughts to creep in. Without even knowing how much I desperately needed it, a wonderful friend gave me a copy of the book *Forty Days to a Joy-Filled Life* by Tommy Newberry.

The "think this, not that" method he writes about is based on Philippians 4:8, which says, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything

is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (New International Version).

The replacement principle is simple. When negative thoughts start creeping in, immediately replace them with good thoughts. And folks, it works! A few examples might be:

- Put out *fear and doubt* by recalling God’s faithfulness.
- Put out *irrational, negative thoughts* by meditating on your blessings, no matter how small.
- Put out *despair over personal problems* by reflecting on *God’s promises*.
- Put out *feelings of bitterness* by remembering *the forgiveness and grace God has personally extended to you*.

You get the idea. Proverbs 4:23 tells us, “Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life” (New Century Version).

### Lesson 3: Cultivate a hopeful heart

There are times when recalibrating our mindset to remember the big picture, our blessed hope, gives us the ability to push through weariness when it seems an impossible task.

Hope is powerful. It is one of the three pillars of Christian life mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13—along with faith and

**We are each a work in progress. Every difficulty and hardship can equip us to become more comforting and compassionate to others.**

love. Hope is a companion of faith, its strength coming from complete trust in God’s promises for us. It’s very different from mere positive thinking. It enables us to tolerate difficult circumstances, rather than just having the ability to put anxieties aside. It transcends the present and reminds us that our current circumstances are not permanent.

It appears this was also another guiding principle for Helen Keller. She once said, “It gives me a deep comforting sense that things seen are temporal and things unseen are eternal.” This is straight out of the Bible—from the words of the apostle Paul (see 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Having endured many severe trials in his own life, Paul knew the value of looking forward to the future. He often reminds us that life will be difficult, but in the midst of all that’s hard he says, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12, New International Version).

If we do not cultivate a hopeful heart, it is difficult to have faith and trust in the overriding plan God is unrolling before us. God’s truthfulness and reliable promises “encourage us to hold on to the hope that is ours. This hope is like an anchor for us. It is strong and sure and keeps us safe” (Hebrews 6:18-19, Easy-to-Read Version).

### Lesson 4: Pray often

Turning to God works far better than turning on the television—or whatever else we might do.

It may also be helpful to remind ourselves that weariness is certainly nothing new, and that preventing difficulties is not God’s primary focus—*spiritual development* is.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who

are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, NIV). He and the Father know the challenges believers face. And although God may not always remove the trial as we ask, or free us from having to endure it, He will always be by our side to guide us through it step by step. Ask Him for His guidance and presence in your life.

And consider: Do we take the time to reflect on and notice His presence? Do we think about all the many times He has led us and intervened in our lives? It can be a helpful exercise to write these moments down as we look back and identify them, and then reflect on them in moments of weariness. Weariness can cause us to forget that God is along for the journey on our daily walk. “The LORD will guide you continually” (Isaiah 58:11).

### Lesson 5: Do for others even when you can’t do for yourself

It’s amazing what happens when we take the focus off ourselves and instead direct it toward others. This mentally diminishes our own circumstances, benefiting us with proper perspective (compare Acts 20:35).

Depending on one’s situation, making the effort to fellowship or interact with others can sometimes feel like an almost impossible feat, especially if you are housebound. But focusing on what you *can* do instead of dwelling on what you *can’t* do is another helpful tool.

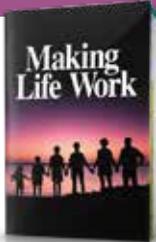
A few simple ways to nurture others when your own situation is limiting is to send texts, emails, cards and letters. And keep in touch by telephone when possible. “He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25, NIV).

### Diminishing weariness

Each of us is a work in progress and completely unique in what we are experiencing in life. Every trial, every difficult situation, and even weariness, helps to mold us into the person we are and whom we are yet to become. It also equips us to be able to comfort others with understanding, empathy and compassion.

As 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 tells us: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

We are whom we are because of our collective experiences and how we choose to handle them—once we figure out how to do that. I pray these few practical points will contribute in helping in that process and in helping us to diminish weariness—both in this time of disruption and uncertainty and in living the rest of our lives. **BT**



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# Will You Be Prepared for the Next Crisis?

The Covid-19 pandemic and recent riots and unrest have been wakeup calls for our world. Will you be prepared for the next crisis?

by Darris McNeely

**B**y nearly every measurement, nations around the world were not prepared for the Covid-19 pandemic. Those charged with public health and political management were caught napping when the sinister virus behind this disease suddenly surged out of China onto an unsuspecting world. While the death toll has proved far lower than early estimates and fears due to flawed modeling and perhaps some of the mitigation steps taken by most governments, the aftermath has revealed a list of missed opportunities that would have saved even more lives and likely lessened the devastating economic impact of this global pandemic.

The world was caught unaware. The few warnings that came fell on deaf ears of a world caught up in what the Bible describes as “carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life” (Luke 21:34). Yet with the shutdown and then cities being ransacked came a sense of foreboding. Now is the time for readers of *Beyond Today* to think soberly about the message we have been sounding for decades. This is a time to listen to the warning God sends to us by the hand of a watchman. God has sent a warning in our time, and we would all do well to listen to what God says in His Word.

## Unprepared for the pandemic

As news reports and briefings through the weeks of shutdown have made clear, it’s obvious that most nations were not prepared for this pandemic.

In the United States, billions of dollars are spent by the nation’s three main agencies tasked with promoting a safe health environment for Americans—the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Yet it is apparent they were not focused, and had not been for some time, on measures needed to provide equipment and plans to deal with this health crisis.

Why were there not enough ventilators to meet the needs claimed by state governors and hospitals? Reports say the national stockpile of ventilators was depleted during the swine flu epidemic of 2009. Supplies and needed equipment were not replenished. Production was delayed for several years because the FDA would not approve new designs. Who is to blame? Will there be accountability? President Trump ordered ventilator production ramped up this year, and the stockpiles are becoming surpluses. Nevertheless, the lack of initial preparedness remains evident.

The CDC, America’s primary agency for fighting and con-

trolling communicable disease, seemed to be on the sidelines in the early stages of the Covid-19 crisis. It was blamed for failing to have widespread and accurate test kits available to identify those with the virus.

The agency had earlier come under scrutiny in 2007 when U.S. Senator Tom Coburn issued a well-documented report titled “CDC Off Center: An Oversight Report on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.” The report presented “a review of how an agency tasked with fighting and preventing disease has spent hundreds of millions of tax dollars for failed prevention efforts, international junkets, and lavish facilities, but cannot demonstrate it is controlling disease.”

The CDC, which works with a \$10 billion annual budget, seems to have been concentrating more on peripheral projects than its primary mission. When masks, test kits and ventilators are in short supply or do not work, there is a systemic problem. Again, where is the accountability in the aftermath of this pandemic?

## Warnings unheeded

We know the virus causing Covid-19 originated in China sometime in late 2019. The first alarm seems to have come from a Chinese doctor, Li Wenliang from Wuhan. Dr. Wenliang was reprimanded by his government for “spreading rumors” and later died from the virus. Other Chinese doctors who criticized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reaction to the event have been censored and even disappeared.

In December, Taiwan warned the World Health Organization (WHO) about the severity of the virus. But Taiwan’s concerns and warnings were ignored. The cover-up by the Chinese government and the failure of the WHO to take early and direct steps to warn and prevent disaster are serious matters for the world to consider going forward. President Trump was so angered at the WHO for its failure to act that he decided to withhold American funding to the organization, then withdrew from it altogether.

Even Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of America’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases within the NIH, did not see the severity of what was coming out of China. In a Jan. 26, 2020, interview he said the American public should not worry about the coronavirus: “It is a very, very low risk to the United States . . . It isn’t something the American public needs to worry about or be frightened about.”

These words soon proved far off the mark. President Trump banned flights coming from China a few days after on Jan. 31



“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

and then in early March banned flights from Europe and the United Kingdom. It seemed within 24 hours nations began to shut down. Schools and offices closed. Restaurants shuttered their doors. Airlines began shedding flights and planes were grounded as passengers had nowhere to travel. Schools and educational institutions scrambled to institute online learning, and millions of employees began working from home while millions more lost their jobs.

In short order the world seemed to shudder to a stop. Within weeks the world entered a major economic crisis on top of a health crisis.

Debates have raged back and forth as to whether the cure has been worse than the illness. Certainly Covid-19 is a lethal disease with many still-unknown properties and unanswered questions, and to date no vaccine. It could be that shutting down businesses and public gatherings and sheltering in place helped “flatten the curve” and reduce the number of deaths in some places. But what is unmistakable is that the massive world shutdown wrecked a period of global economic prosperity and that it will take years to recover.

Billions of dollars of wealth were wiped out. Hundreds of thousands of businesses will not reopen. The economic toll will translate into severe social costs such as depression, suicides and diminished personal earnings over coming years affecting people’s ability to live healthy and productive lives and provide for others, with more and more dependency on government. The human toll is incalculable.

### A world transformed in just one month

What the world lived through, within the space of about one month, was a massive collapse of a prosperous economy. The United States was at nearly full employment, the stock market’s Dow Jones Industrial Average had rocketed to over 28,000 points, and the economy was producing higher wages and an improving standard of living. The global economy—the train

being pulled by the powerful U.S. economy—was also doing well.

In early March when fears of millions dying from the Covid-19 virus began to emerge, we saw the darkening shadow of fear begin creeping over the nations. Italy was experiencing rising deaths, and President Trump had already embargoed travel into the United States from China.

Within hours of a nationally televised speech from the Oval Office where he announced that all incoming passenger flights from Europe would be canceled, it began to dawn on us just how much was changing. In America the National Basketball Association canceled the rest of its season when a player tested positive for the virus. Other professional sports leagues followed suit. The cascading shutdowns and cancellations brought thousands of communities to a halt.

The biblical prophet

Hosea, prophesying in the time of the ancient kingdom of Israel before its destruction, describes how quickly a nation could collapse because of its sins against

God. When they try to seek God during a period of national crisis, Hosea said, He is not to be found. Why? “They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage” (Hosea 5:7). What does this mention of a “new moon” mean?

The prophet Hosea foretold that within just one month—a lunar cycle averaging just under 30 days—a catastrophic collapse can occur. While recent events are not a direct fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy, such rapid change happened in March 2020. Within a month, trillions of dollars of wealth disappeared and a prosperous world economy seized up.

The opening paragraph of an article in *The Wall Street Journal* said it succinctly: “The April unemployment rate surged to a record 14.7% and payrolls dropped by a historic 20.5 million workers as the coronavirus pandemic hit the economy, *wiping out a decade of job gains in a single month*” (Sarah Chaney and Eric Morath, “April Unemployment Rate Rose to a Record 14.7%,” May 8, 2020, emphasis added throughout). By June the unemployment rate had grown to more than 22 percent, or approximately 40 million jobless Americans.

### Will we learn from this?

The wise will learn a lesson from this. The scripture quoted at the outset about worldly distractions also carries a warning. Note the fuller context of Jesus Christ’s words here:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day [of calamitous events leading up to Christ’s return] come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

The cover of our January-February 2020 issue of *Beyond*

*Today* magazine bore the headline, “Are You Ready for 2020?” Well, it turns out the world was *not* ready for what was about to happen. And to be honest, we at *Beyond Today* freely admit that we did not see what was coming either—at least not in the form and with the suddenness it came.

Yet we have long been urging our readers to read their Bibles and understand what its prophecies say about the fragility of our world and our uncertain times. *Beyond Today* takes seriously what Jesus Christ said in the passage just quoted.

We understand how we can be “weighed down with the cares of this life.” Our lives are busy and hectic and full of distracting details, many of which can divert our attention from the state of spiritual alertness we need to stay on top of what’s happening. To be blunt, a disciple of Jesus Christ must live his or her life at a spiritual “DefCon Level 3” or above. That’s not easy to do or to maintain for a prolonged time.

I find myself at the age where people begin to think about slowing down with work and retiring. I have grandchildren whom I want to spend more time with and watch grow up in their teen years. I know many of our readers share the same feelings regarding family and plans for the future. We are caught up in so many details that consume our interests, passion and days.

There is nothing wrong or out of place with these desires—*so long as we keep them tempered by the knowledge and understanding of Bible prophecy.* Bible prophecy provides the framework for understanding the general contours of events shaping the landscape of today’s world. Using it properly, we can take appropriate steps to be prepared spiritually and even physically for what happens.

I have lived long enough and been a student of prophecy long enough to know there are times when prophetic fulfillment is, at least discernibly, on idle and times when fulfillment is speeding up. We are in a period when prophesied conditions are accelerating. *It is a time to pay more attention!*

### Time to watch

We read above where Jesus told His disciples to “*watch and pray always.*” What does this mean?

The theme of watching was earlier presented in Ezekiel 33, where God told the prophet Ezekiel that He was placing him in the role of a watchman to the people of Israel:

“Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: “When I bring the sword [of war and devastation] upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his *own* head.

““He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.

““But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand”” (verses 1-6).

The message of warning to the people was to prepare for a

time of siege and all that might mean, including famine and disease. They were to take precautions to meet the trial and stand, endure and prevail. Jesus Christ uses this term “take heed”—the same as “watch”—warning us *to be aware and alert and to discern the times of our life and to understand where we are in God’s unfolding prophetic plan and purpose for the world.*

A disciple will want to understand the signs Jesus foretold—spiritual deception, war, famine, disease epidemics and natural catastrophes (Matthew 24:4-7)—and live a sober, holy and godly life. When you know a time of trouble and ultimate judgment on the world is coming, *you live differently.* You know God is real, that His Word is a sure guide to life, and you take steps to live in alignment with God’s laws and truth. That is what a true disciple will do.

A disciple will also pray to God in cooperation with His desire to build a relationship with us, nurturing a spiritual connection of love and trust. Faith in God and His love for us allows us to manage our emotional health during times of stress such as this present pandemic and social unrest. Many of us face uncertainty in jobs, health and the large picture of what is happening to our country and the world. It’s unnerving and frightening and can cause some to come unglued emotionally. I see it in some of the strongest people I know. Worry and fear are at the door. Do not let yourself be overwhelmed. *You can cope*—with God’s help, trusting in His plan and purpose.

When we see cities locked down under quarantine, or more recently burning and filled with rioters, we are seeing things most of us have never experienced before. Our world has been shocked and startled. A wakeup call has been given.

Through the pages of the Bible we can gain understanding of what such crises mean. As you talk to God on your knees in prayer, He and Jesus Christ will give you comfort and understanding rooted in spiritual truth. This is the key to this moment.

### Going back to “normal”?

We might prefer the world to return, at least in its various positive aspects, to the way we remember it only a few short months ago. But in many ways it will be a different world going forward. We will be a long time recovering. Life will go on, but something has changed. This world will not be the same.

How will *your* world be different? For a disciple of Jesus Christ, we cannot go back to “normal.” A disciple of Jesus must dig into what our Master taught. We must take to heart what He commanded. We must take heed, watch and pray, and avoid the dangerous snare that will entrap all those who live on the earth in the time of the end.

Could God be measuring your life now? This is a moment of crisis that can bring clarity and purpose. Use it wisely. Do not let yourself be caught unaware when the next crisis looms! 



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# God's Message: Think Differently!

Could God be using this time of massive disruption to gain our attention? Just what is God telling you?

by Victor Kubik

**T**he Covid-19 crisis and ensuing problems have disrupted the entire world. One cannot help but wonder if what we have gone through is on some level a message from God. If so, what is He saying?

Throughout time, God has spoken to people through prophets, visions, angels and other messengers. And He has also spoken to mankind through the events we go through. A time of calamity wakes us up to reality and motivates us to think more clearly. In the current period of trouble, we need to grasp that God is indeed speaking to us, and that His message is clear.

## Drawing lessons from unexpected tragedies

Jesus Christ made use of certain crises of His time to draw a lesson about the unexpected. In Luke 13 He referred to two contemporary tragedies to make an important point. The first one concerned worshippers from Galilee massacred at the Jerusalem temple on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. The other event was a building collapse that killed a number of people. Notice the account in Luke 13:1-5:

“About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. ‘Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?’ Jesus asked. ‘Is that why they suffered? Not at all! *And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.* And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? No, and I tell you again that *unless you repent, you will perish, too*” (New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

The Greek word translated “repent” here is *metanoeo*, which means *to change one’s mind—to think differently*. Jesus is telling us that unless we experience a major change of direction in our minds, hearts and lives, we could perish like the victims caught up unexpectedly in these two catastrophic incidents.

It’s a sobering lesson for today, when an epidemic has unexpectedly cut short the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and millions are out of work, with society reeling.

## God’s plea to man throughout the Bible

One of the chief themes of the Bible is *repentance*. Jesus Christ’s ministry began with: “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel

of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent* [change your thinking—think differently], and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).

Repentance—thinking, acting and living differently—became the primary message of the early Church: “Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent*, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

This message continued in subsequent sermons: “*Repent* therefore and *be converted* [change the direction of your life], that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19-20).

The New Testament word for the act of repenting, *metanoeo*, is complemented by the Old Testament Hebrew word *shuv*. This word is commonly translated as “turn,” and often carries the sense of “turn back,” “go back” or “return.” It occurs more than 1,000 times in the Old Testament. The plea from God to man throughout the Bible is to *turn to Him* and to *turn away* from evil.

When you understand that God is calling out to man to think, act and live differently, you will understand one of the great purposes of life. You will also come to see why our world is filled with suffering and sorrow. The story of the Bible is a chronicle of man’s corrupt thinking and its consequences and God’s message to change our thinking and be freed from the enslaving grip of evil.

## Disturbing history of wrong thinking and tragic results

In the Garden of Eden our first human parents were given a choice between the fruit of two different trees. Taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would bring death. Tempted by the evil serpent, Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator and were subsequently barred from the tree of life. We have all followed in the same error and penalty: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

For the next 1,600 years man’s pattern of thinking became worse and worse: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every intent of the*

*thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5).

This pattern of thought so corrupted mankind that God decided to restart civilization with Noah. Noah had a mindset of thinking differently from the rest of society and found grace in the eyes of God (Genesis 6:8). God used Noah to repopulate the earth through his descendants after a catastrophic worldwide Flood.

About 400 years later, God started working through a man named Abraham and proceeded to his son Isaac, and then to his son Jacob and the sons he fathered. Jacob was renamed Israel, and his sons became the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel.

This fledgling nation migrated to Egypt and after several generations found itself enslaved there. God delivered the Israelites under the leadership of Moses. God then made a covenant with them involving their obedience to the law He gave to them, particularly the Ten Commandments, a guide for proper moral thinking.

But the people had great difficulty aligning their thinking with the mind of God. They consistently violated God’s laws and brought on themselves the consequences and curses God had warned them about. Joshua, Israel’s next leader, told them in an impassioned farewell speech to think and live differently from the nations around them (Joshua 23–24).

However, the nation repeatedly veered from this exhortation over the next 300 years, known as the time of the Judges. Of that time we’re told, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). The fruits were not good—wanton murder, theft, rape, oppression and violence. People wonder why there is so much violence in the Bible. The answer, as especially seen here, is that man’s rejection of God produces such consequences.

The Israelites went on to call for a human monarchy, and the people still failed to obey God over the next 400 years when their kings ruled over them. The nation split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and both fell to foreign empires, with the people carried away into captivity. Why? Because their thinking succumbed to that of the nations around them. They chose to break God’s laws and violate His covenants.

### Repeated calls for repentance

Through the prophets God reached out to both nations with a message pleading for them to turn and choose a different way of thinking. Here are just a few of the many admonitions:

- “As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. *Turn, turn from your evil ways!* For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11).
- “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).
- “‘Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ . . . Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:12-13).
- “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves

a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die [?] . . . Therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

The Israelites as a whole never understood what God commanded them to do for their own good. They never had a sustained period of obedience and adherence to the covenant their ancestors agreed to. So the reasons for the captivity of both nations are spelled out clearly:

“For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God . . . and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before [them] . . . Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right . . . They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger” (2 Kings 17:7-11).

### A message for all of us

God’s call to repent and turn to Him remains. It continues throughout the entire Bible and still goes out today. It is a command not just to Israel but to all mankind. When the apostle Paul preached in Athens, he concluded with these powerful words: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but *now commands all men everywhere to repent*, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

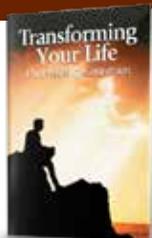
This is a message we all need to heed!

What is God trying to tell us through the crises now gripping the world? Is this not a time to give our full attention to God and what He offers us? Is it not a time to think about where we’re heading? Is it not an opportunity to change our thinking and turn from the way we now live to the God who loves us? What do we have to lose?

You can change your thinking and change your life by submitting to God and receiving His forgiveness and ongoing help. By doing so you will embark on a life that is ultimately fulfilling, entering a relationship that will prepare and protect you in facing whatever is yet before us.

God’s desire for all of us is expressed so well by the apostle Peter: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [regarding Christ’s return to judge the world], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

God is still calling on us to repent. He is giving you that opportunity right now. Make good use of it! Think differently. Turn your life around, and believe the good news Jesus preached! **BT**



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What does it mean to repent—to think differently? How do we begin to do that, and how do we follow through? What does God want to see in us? To discover the answers, download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

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# The Power of Forgiveness

Are you suffering guilt over what you've done in the past? Are you holding on to resentment for what others have done to you? There is freedom in forgiveness—and in learning to forgive.

by Victor Kubik

**O**n the morning of Oct. 2, 2006, the unthinkable descended on a sleepy little town. Something snapped in the mind of a 32-year-old milk truck driver in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, an area known for its Amish population. Suffering from apparent and unspecified mental illness, the truck driver wrote out suicide notes for his wife and three children.

In one note he mentioned the unresolved rage he felt against God for the death of his infant daughter. Then he loaded a 9mm handgun and other weapons in his truck and set out for a one-room schoolhouse in the Old Order Amish community of Nickel Mines. The trucker, now a gunman, took 10 young Amish girls hostage at the tiny schoolhouse, allowing other adults and young boys to escape. He told some that he wanted revenge against God.

Then the dire situation became horrific. Just 30 minutes after the hostage situation began, the gunman unexpectedly opened fire on the helpless young girls, who were between the ages of 6 and 13. Two minutes later, as state police stormed the school, the assailant turned his gun on himself.

Two girls died instantly. Three others died shortly afterwards. Five miraculously survived.

The community and soon the people of America were stunned, horrified and outraged. Any school shooting was horrible enough, but the thought of innocent young children of an Old Order Amish group being murdered in cold blood was too much.

Yet out of this darkness came a light—a freeing way of thinking and living in line with that laid out to us long before in the pages of Scripture.

## An unexpected reaction

As both locals and people around the world tried to make sense of the awful event that had happened, an unexpected miracle began to take shape. A grieving grandfather of one of the murdered girls warned other family members not to fall prey to hatred, stating, *“We must not think evil of this man.”*

Astonishingly, unrelenting forgiveness swelled up from the Amish community. Amish neighbors intentionally sought out members of the shooter's family to express comfort and forgiveness. Some visited the shooter's widow, his parents and his in-laws. A private fund was set up for the family of the shooter.

The result? A sea of wonder washed over the community. In

the face of unspeakable horror, this response of love from the grieving Amish overwhelmed all who heard about it.

Instead of focusing on the horrible details of the event, 2,400 media stories about forgiveness erupted around the planet (Ann Rogers, “Nickel Mines Legacy: Forgive First,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sept. 30, 2007).

The widow of the shooter later wrote an open letter to her Amish neighbors: “Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. Gifts you've given have touched our hearts in a way no words can describe. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely

**We must realize that a great debt has been forgiven us. What *others* owe *us* is paltry in comparison.**

thank you” (quoted by Damien McElroy, “Amish Killer's Widow Thanks Families of Victims for Forgiveness,” *The Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 16, 2006).

I have read this story several times. Each time I not only shudder at the horror but am speechless at the incongruous reaction of the Amish community and the families of the victims. I've asked myself: How would I react? Could I ever forgive such senseless horror perpetrated against my loved ones and the permanent loss? This level of forgiveness is totally out of the sphere of natural human behavior and reaction.

But it's not without precedent. Let's look at another incongruous story about forgiveness.

## A lesson about not forgiving as forgiven

In Matthew 18 quite the opposite is told in the parable of the unforgiving servant. It starts by the apostle Peter asking Jesus Christ a question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (verse 21).

Jesus responded: “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents [a vast fortune]. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had,

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God and to teach all nations to obey everything Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message



Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind.

Through this magazine, our TV program, and in dozens of helpful free study guides, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our survival. We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose as taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services nearest you, contact us at the appropriate address on page 31. Visitors are always welcome.

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and that payment be made.

“The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii [a sizeable amount but nothing next to what he had been forgiven]; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

“So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ‘So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.’” (verses 22-35).

This is a narrative that on the surface seems absurd but with the lesson self-evident. In this scenario one is forgiven millions in debt but is blind to what that means and what he's to take away from it. After his awesome windfall the forgiven person comes upon someone who owes him a small amount in comparison and demands that he pay up right then and there. When the benevolent master who has forgiven him much finds out about his churlish behavior, he withdraws his blessing and demands that the original debt be repaid.

This parable teaches us about comparative debt, forgiveness and compassion. The lesson here is about how we are to extend the same grace we receive to those who are indebted to us.

The two comparative debts were very disproportional, which is like the difference between what God

has forgiven us and what we need to forgive others.

## The greatest example

There is yet one more story that also defies human reasoning about forgiveness.

Before Jesus came to the earth as a man He was called the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). He later became a human being: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (verse 14)

Jesus Christ then allowed Himself to be killed. What folly, one might think. Why would He want to subject Himself to this? There was great purpose in it, the apostle Paul explaining in Philippians 2 that it exemplified the kind of thinking we ourselves are to have.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” Paul said (verse 5), noting that “though he was God he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to” (verse 6, New Living Translation). Instead, Jesus “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (verses 7-8, English Standard Version).

A *huge* debt has been forgiven us, a debt we could never hope to repay. Our debt can only be paid with our life. However, Jesus came into our life and paid that debt for us. In this state of grace with our God, should we not be able to forgive anything smaller between ourselves?

Christ was blameless, perfect and innocent. He harmed no one. He did nothing wrong, sinful nor illegal. He recognized the Roman occupational government and its laws. He upheld the Levitical priesthood. But many among the jealous, self-righteous, hypocritical Jewish religious leadership of the time incessantly sought to discredit Jesus and plotted how they could kill Him.

All the while Christ preached to large crowds and fed thousands, answered questions of morality with impeccable wisdom, healed hundreds if not thousands of people and performed



## Forgiveness ultimately frees our mind from guilt, shame and blame preventing us from experiencing peace of mind.

many other miracles. The envy and hatred of those in the religious establishment toward Him was mind-boggling. In the end they had Him killed.

At the very end of Jesus' earthly life, He left these words to all who hurt Him—from the religious leaders to the shouting mobs demanding His crucifixion to the Roman officials and mocking soldiers: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). How unjust and undeserved! Of course they were misled by Satan—yet so is all the world in the evils committed against fellow man.

### What can we learn from these stories?

When we become a Christian we embark on a journey of *thinking differ-*

*ently* from the way we thought before.

We come to an awareness of a living God whom we can talk and relate to. We have a self-awareness of who we are. We then take responsibility for our lives. We have free will to make choices to do things differently. No other physical form of life has that capability.

From the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry He spoke of loving your adversaries and all who hate and abuse you. In the Sermon on the Mount, He gave His assembled listeners homework assignments to practice forgiveness: "I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

In the same message He taught His audience how to pray, with this sentiment included: ". . . And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12, NLT). He underscored this focus just after giving the prayer outline: "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (verses 14-15).

This is a vital, mind-changing step in the upward journey toward peace of mind. We have to *forgive*, which means to stop feeling angry or resentful toward someone for an offense, flaw or mistake. Forgiveness is not just a nice thing to do or a good personal attribute. It is a plateau we reach and maintain with wide-open awareness and a determination that ultimately frees our mind from guilt, shame and blame preventing us from experiencing peace of mind.

Concerning the above passage, Matthew 6:12-15, noted theologian and teacher John Stott states this in his book *The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary*:

"Once, as I was talking to a Christian psychiatrist, I touched on the problem of forgiveness and the need men have for it. The psychiatrist said, 'As far as I am concerned most of what a psychiatrist does is directly related to forgiveness. People come to him with problems. They feel guilty about their part in these problems. They are seeking forgiveness. In effect, they confess their sins to the counselor and find that he forgives them. Then a pattern is set up in which they can show their change of heart in tangible ways toward the other person or persons.'

"The psychiatrist concluded by observing that *the great need to be forgiven by*

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men that many persons feel is only a shadow of a far greater need that all men have to be forgiven by God” (emphasis added throughout).

All of us have been hurt by someone else’s actions or words. Vengeful acts are often committed against those close at hand. It can be criticism, betrayal, misunderstanding and even well-meaning thoughts that nonetheless cause offense and bring on anger and pain. It might be reflexive self-defense. If these feelings are not dealt with, they can grow bigger and bigger and balloon far out of proportion to the original slight to the point of consuming us. Forgiveness frees us from that encumbrance.

The alleged perpetrator is usually not the only one suffering. So is the one who remains unforgiving.

I am so saddened when I see people harbor ill will, sometimes for years, over insults and actions of the past. They just can’t move past it, perhaps feeling that letting go will minimize what happened. Yet forgiveness does not lessen the wrong that was done. Rather it releases us from the grip of consuming thoughts of injustice.

(A word of wisdom: Nothing in this article should be construed as recommending that a person stay in a situation of domestic abuse or violence. Such situations often escalate to greater danger for one or both partners. If you or someone you know is in such a situation, *seek help and remove yourself from danger*. As Proverbs 27:12 [NLT] tells us, “A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions.”)

### So what do we do?

Ideally we may want to go and talk to the offender or the offended, but if we can’t, we can still ask God to cleanse our conscience so we can go on in peace.

Jesus instructing us to pray about forgiveness from God and forgiving others in His model prayer suggests that prayer is the best place to discuss any difficulty in this with God. Tell Him how you feel. Tell Him how you don’t want to feel. Ask Him to take away hostility, bitterness, revenge and every other negative thought and then help you to face the world with a clean heart.

Forgiving, letting go, will open the door to peace of mind and healthier relationships. Forgiveness is a vital component in our physical, mental, emotional and especially spiritual health.

Some long-standing unforgiven feuds between peoples go back millennia, as generation after generation fights the same fruitless battle. On a national scale people just can’t forgive past wrongs—if they even remember what they were. A case in point is the never-ending feud between the Arabs and Jews. This quarrel actually goes back to Abraham’s sons Ishmael and Isaac nearly 4,000 years ago!

The act of forgiveness goes beyond relationship issues with those around us. We may be trapped in guilt and shame for our own past sins. We may have done terrible things or been guilty of gross neglect in the past, and that still jars us. We may have neglected our marriage and children and feel guilty years on because we recall James 4:17: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

Some things we’ve done cannot be undone or put right. But we can be forgiven, with the sin removed from our record. In such cases, the only path to wholeness is through forgiveness and trusting in God’s promises while committing to live right

and help those we’ve hurt in whatever way possible.

### Finding and granting freedom

We may still shudder at our past. We may have hurt people decades ago and now regret what we did, troubled with guilt over our past actions. We may never have apologized or cannot because those people are no longer living. Or you and the other party were never able to reconcile dereliction, addiction, unfaithfulness in marriage.

Whatever it is, go to God to gain freedom from the grip of the past. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). What a blessing it is to be freed of guilt and stand fresh before God and man: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity” (Psalm 32:1-2).

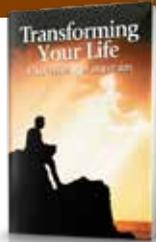
There are amazing stories of people horribly abused in war who heroically forgave their tormentors. Corrie Ten Boom from the Netherlands was one who spent time in a Nazi concentration camp and saw and experienced the vilest abuse from her captors. However, she didn’t waste her life in bitterness. After the war she traveled and lectured widely about forgiveness. One saying she’s known for is “Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, only to find out that the prisoner was me.” Proverbs 11:17 says, “The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.”

When people were cut to the heart by Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost at the beginning of the New Testament Church and asked what they should do, he replied: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39, New International Version).

The message of forgiveness was given top billing in the preaching of the gospel. It should always be a constant reminder to us to also be forgiving, as it is so easy to be the opposite.

We’ve seen that forgiveness can be extended even in the most difficult circumstances, such as that of the Amish school shooting. We must further realize that a great debt has been forgiven us. What *others* owe *us* is paltry in comparison. Treat it that way. Always remember what Jesus endured in choosing to pay the debt we incurred for sins. And recognize that as He was killed, necessitated by the sin of every one of us, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Let us extend this same mercy. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” **BT**



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# Is There a Better Way?

As if a pandemic, a battered economy and soaring unemployment weren't enough, America has once more been shocked by social unrest and racial strife. Is there a path to a better way?

by Victor Kubik

**W**hen it hit, it really, really hurt. America was already exhausted by not just thousands of deaths from Covid-19, but record unemployment and economic catastrophe in reaction to it. Then came the horrible, high-profile killing of an African-American man by a police officer in Minneapolis, fixing the mid-year capstone of a year gone *terribly bad*. In the days and weeks following, multiple thousands took to the streets in protest of the death of George Floyd, who quickly became an icon of terrible injustice. Rage and riots engulfed many U.S. cities.

As time passed, three questions dominated: Why did this happen? What can be done? How can we achieve peace and heal the land?

## Upfront and personal

For me, the news felt personal. Like many others, I have experienced my own personal share of injustice and oppression. I had come to the United States in 1949 with my Ukrainian parents as an immigrant from war-torn Europe. I was born in a refugee camp in Germany. My extended family knows well oppression, strife and politically driven upheaval of the first order.

Ironically, it was in Minneapolis—the site of the awful death of George Floyd—that a selfless sponsor graciously stepped forward to bring my family from the twisted rubble of World War II to a new future of promise in America.

What seems further ironic to me is the fact that Minneapolis and the Twin Cities area hold a well-deserved positive reputation for accepting, supporting and including refugees from all over the world! So when I learned of this tragic news in my adopted American home, I was cut to the heart.

## Relieving oppression

My background helped fuel a lifetime passion for helping people who are oppressed and disadvantaged. In tandem with my lifelong service as a pastor, my wife Bev and I have lived and worked all over the world, providing extensive humanitarian work for the children of Chernobyl in Ukraine (my ancestral homeland) and many relief projects in South America,

Asia and Africa—including Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and other predominantly black African nations, some of the poorest in the world.

Through all this Bev and I have had the privilege of working alongside people of different colors, nationalities and cultures. We have come to know and love people everywhere, regardless of their stature, economic achievement or place in life. We know firsthand what Paul meant when he stated in the first century: *“It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile [non-Israelite], circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us”* (Colossians 3:11, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

(Ironically, in ancient times the term “barbarian” or “barbaric” was initially used by Greeks of “babbling” by anyone who didn't speak Greek—amounting to a cultural slur against anyone outside the Mediterranean area, the rest of the world. Together with anti-Semitism, it represented an early form of racism.)

## Racism condemned

To God—who doesn't show favoritism (Romans 2:11)—skin color and ethnic background are not what people are measured by. All have full access to Him through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And as the current president of the organization that publishes this magazine, I can declare with authority that we at *Beyond Today* condemn racism. We condemn so-called “white superiority.” Neither has anything to do with God!

Referring to the current age, the Bible speaks of the injustice of people and human governments. It reminds one of what the prophet Amos declared: *“You twist justice, making it a bitter pill for the oppressed”* (Amos 5:7, NLT).

While injustice is rampant in this world, it is also evident that violence usually achieves *nothing* in terms of solutions for society and most often makes things worse. Many countries struggle today with finding solutions for economic and societal equality.

Consider this fact: America itself, long a beacon of political freedom to much of the world, *allowed almost a full century to lapse* from the time the 13th, 14th and 15th U.S. Constitutional

amendments were passed—guaranteeing what the Constitution calls “the blessings of liberty”—to the later time when President John Kennedy called for strong laws guaranteeing equal treatment of every American, regardless of race (finally passed into law the summer after Kennedy’s assassination and known as the Civil Rights Act of 1964). Despite the good intentions of many, human governments fall short.

There *is* a better way.

### “Darkness cannot put out darkness”

Going forward, let us consider the words of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1966, Dr. King remarked: “I’m concerned about a better world. I’m concerned about justice . . . and when one is concerned about that, *he can never advocate violence*. For through violence you may murder a murderer, but you can’t murder murder . . . Darkness cannot put out darkness; only light can do that.”

The answer, according to Dr. King? “*Love* is ultimately the only answer to humankind’s problems . . . I have seen too much hate . . . If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love.”

Speaking of the words of the apostle John in 1 John 4:7-8, Dr. King noted, “John was right: God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.”

From a biblical perspective, that “meaning of ultimate reality” represents a *better way*.

Again, we know and teach from the Bible that God Himself is love (1 John 4:8). God defines and manifests this incomparable quality, and Paul urges us to “be imitators of God and live a life of love” (Ephesians 5:1-2, New International Version). There is no room for racism here.

God created the incredible human potential of life eternal, of becoming God’s very children (1 John 3:1). His great purpose marvelously focuses on “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). This includes men and women of all walks of life, being brought together now as well as in the coming future Kingdom of God.

In a time when the global economy has been savaged and many people are divided in the face of violence, how do we learn to love? How can we find “the meaning of ultimate reality”?

Thankfully, we have a solid pathway that can lead us to the answers to these critical questions. A remarkable Teacher, sent from God Himself, laid out the way.

### Become peacemakers

Speaking before thousands of people, Jesus Christ made an important distinction for those who would desire peace: “Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9, King James Version). Note that Jesus didn’t say “blessed are the *peace-lovers*,” or those who simply *wish* for peace. Jesus said that blessings will come to those who *pursue peace and live peace!*

For this we need a standard. We need a clear benchmark to help us determine and measure whether we’re on the path of pursuing peace. This standard must be written on our hearts, driving our thoughts and actions (see Jeremiah 31:33).

And indeed we have such a standard!

British statesman Sir Winston Churchill wrote this a full

century ago, referring to the Bible and its teachings: “We owe to the Jews *a system of ethics* which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be *incomparably the most precious possession of mankind*, worth in fact the fruits of *all wisdom and learning put together*.”

Here are two critical directives from that “system of ethics”: “You shall *love* the LORD your God with *all* your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). “You shall *love* your neighbor *as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18).

After teaching that *peacemakers* are the ones who are favored by God, Jesus Christ later declared that these two ancient statements were the *core teachings* of the Bible, the two *great commandments* (Matthew 22:36-40). How important are these? As Jesus emphasized, “*All* the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (verse 40, NLT). They apply equally to *all* cultures and groups!

### Finding and securing peace

Accordingly, if we want to be peacemakers, we must understand that peace *begins* by having peace with God. When we have peace with God, we can have peace with others.

Note this marvelous statement from Paul: “Christ himself has brought peace to us . . . *our hostility toward each other was put to death*” (Ephesians 2:14, 16, NLT).

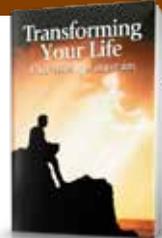
To be a *peacemaker*, we have to embrace a standard of performance—we have to love *both* God *and* our neighbor. But first we must recognize that we all fall short of that standard and need to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. We recognize that we have rejected God and His Word, living cut off from Him, and we need to turn and surrender our lives to Him (see “God’s Message: Think Differently!” beginning on page 15). When we do that, we come under grace. We receive a new heart that’s oriented toward God. We begin to build, reflect and “experience *God’s peace*, which exceeds anything we can understand” (Philippines 4:7, NLT).

This world desperately needs God’s truth. Tragically, for many, “the way of peace they do *not* know, and there is *no justice* in their paths” (Isaiah 59:8, English Standard Version).

At first, you may not see a way. It might seem futile to you. Can one person choose a path of peace and really make a difference? The answer is *yes*. One person can be an example to many. Each of us needs to reorder our lives. Put the right things first. Make right decisions. And then *trust God* to deliver.

What are these right things? “What does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

What’s *your* choice? There is a better way! Reject the injustices and violence of this world. Make peace with God through Jesus Christ, and live a life of love for all people! **BT**



**LEARN MORE**

How do you begin to turn your life around and begin living as a peacemaker? We need to look to God for His guidance and help. Download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to learn what God wants and expects of you.

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# Coronavirus Fallout: The Economic Impact

Pandemic-related business shutdowns caused unprecedented damage to the U.S. and world economy. Here's an overview of some of the damage done.

by Justin Palm

**U**ncharted waters. Never-before-seen. Record-breaking. Unprecedented. Cataclysmic. Horrific. At some point the adjectives run out. It's hard to know exactly how to describe the post-coronavirus economic situation, or to know where to start. It's so big and has so many tentacles. No one really knows the destruction that's been done so far after widespread and prolonged closures of millions of businesses.

So many questions hang out there—questions on the minds of millions around the entire world, particularly in America, the leading nation in the global economy.

- Will the economy bounce back? If so, how long might it take?
- Will more government stimulus be needed?
- After the new normal, can we ever go back to the *old* normal?
- What will be the political fallout at election time?
- Have America and other nations committed some kind of economic suicide?

One thing is for certain. People who say they know what will happen to the economy—whether they are “experts” or not—*do not actually know*. They are all speculating or giving educated guesses. Things will not bounce back overnight. The house that's been (at least partially) burned down will not magically be restored in an instant.

## Straw polls in an American suburb

Over the last three months I worked a side gig in food delivery services. I interacted with *thousands* of people affected in various ways by the Covid-19 pandemic. Everyone had a story to tell, and I asked a lot of questions. I conducted countless on-the-fly interviews and informal polls.

In the first few weeks of the shutdown, I estimate that around 40 percent of those I asked said they were out of work—laid off, furloughed or outright fired.

An employee at a hotel, part of a large chain, said it was at only 3 percent capacity. This is practically zero. Multiple hotels had to shut down entire floors.

Another hotel clerk told me that *90 employees* in just that one hotel in just one suburb had been laid off.

The majority of people I spoke with had fear, worry and uncertainty in their eyes.

People are on the edge. Hunger and food insecurity has become a real problem for some. In cities around the nation, families in cars waited in lines that stretched for miles to visit food banks. As a father of three young children, I can only imagine what was happening in each of those cars—the crying, the questions, the forced patience, the confusion, the anxiety—as hungry children

waited for hours in a slow-moving line to get access to food.

## From record employment to record unemployment

Never before have so many people around the world been out of work so fast. From record-low unemployment figures in the United States early in the year, in just two months *36 million* Americans filed unemployment claims. This statistic is almost impossible to comprehend.

A headline in early May painted a sobering picture of how quickly America's roaring economy has collapsed, declaring, “The Jobs Report Friday Will Be a Portrait of Devastation.”

The article stated: “If the consensus forecast by analysts—that employers will cut 22 million jobs from their payrolls—turns out to be correct, *10 years' worth* of job growth will have been wiped out in a *single month*. The expansion after the last recession was late and slow in ways that were destructive to millions of people's lives. But America had finally recovered. And now, *in a single month*, a decade's worth of progress . . . has vanished. The numbers may seem dry and impersonal, but beneath them are the individual and distinctive stories of millions of people” (Neil Irwin, *The New York Times*, May 7, 2020, emphasis added throughout).

And then there were those who were unable to file unemployment claims due to issues in the application process:

“With unemployment benefits agencies buckling under the strain of new applicants, even that figure [36 million] is likely a severe undercount. A report from the Economic Policy Institute published last month [April] found that for every 10 people trying to apply for unemployment, *three to four couldn't get through the system to make a claim*, and another *two out of 10 said the process was too complicated to try*” (Colin Letcher and Mia Sato, “How Unemployment Systems Are Failing Workers Around the Nation,” *The Markup*, May 7, 2020).

This was the case with one woman I talked to a few weeks ago. She'd been laid off from a daycare business but couldn't apply for unemployment—the website kept crashing and the phone lines were busy. She tried for a week with no success. Maybe she eventually got through. Hopefully.

Thankfully the jobs report in early June was more hopeful than many thought it would be, as 2.5 million jobs were added, mostly in the restaurant industry. But unemployment remains terribly high. This is the new economic normal for individuals. What about companies?

## Busted businesses

While the U.S. federal government's Paycheck Protection

Program helped offset some of the pain, the landscape is bleak for American businesses. Many companies could not afford to lose two to three months of income.

A survey in early May showed that 52 percent of small businesses across America expect to be out of business within six months: “New research released today by SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) warns the state of small business could go from bad to worse, as 52 percent expect to be out of business within six months. The survey . . . identifies significant, widespread economic pain—such as layoffs, furloughs, and lost revenue” (“Covid-19 Could Shutter Most Small Businesses,” press release on Business Wire, May 6, 2020).

And some of the surviving ones don’t plan to rehire all the workers they had to lay off. A new study reveals a sobering reality for workers who thought their jobs would be waiting for them after the pandemic leveled off:

“Of small and medium-sized businesses that have been forced to shut down during the coronavirus pandemic, more than half of owners surveyed by Facebook said they won’t rehire the same workers they had before the crisis . . . Facebook said it surveyed 86,000 small and medium-sized business owners, managers and employees . . .

“The report highlights the lasting economic impact of the coronavirus and the especially dire effect it’s having on smaller businesses without the same level of access to capital that larger corporations often have” (Lauren Feiner, “Coronavirus Devastating Small Businesses: One-Third Won’t Reopen, 55% Won’t Rehire Same Workers, Facebook Survey Finds,” CNBC, May 18, 2020).

### Layoffs and bankruptcies mount

It’s not just mom-and-pop businesses being hit. In late April, Google slashed its marketing budget in half and froze the hiring of full-time and contract workers.

A number of other big companies announced dramatic changes. Online travel lodging marketplace Airbnb announced it was laying off 25 percent of its staff. “It’s an ominous sign for the tech economy. Brian Chesky, the company’s founder and CEO, told staff . . . that the company’s revenue would be halved and that it would terminate about 1,900 of its 7,500 staff members” (Theodore Schleifer, “The Layoffs at Airbnb Cast a Dark Shadow Over Silicon Valley,” Vox, May 5, 2020).

Ride-hailing business Uber “is also reportedly in the process of mulling layoffs that could account for about 20 percent of its staff.

Lyft has already laid off about 17 percent of its workforce” (ibid.).

In early May the clothing retailer J. Crew announced it’s filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, followed not long after by Neiman Marcus, J.C. Penney and Tuesday Morning. If such steps are being taken by some of America’s largest companies, how many smaller or medium-sized companies can stay afloat?

We could point to many more examples, and it’s still just the tip of the iceberg. The overall picture is sobering. America and the rest of the world at large have a long road of recovery ahead of it. Hard times are before us. But there is still hope.

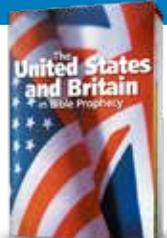
### God’s “predictions” laid out in advance

No one knows exactly what will happen to the national and global economy in the weeks and months ahead. But while economists and experts make their educated predictions, God who rules over the universe has issued His own “predictions”—not guesses but sure prophecies, which He will bring to pass in His infinite power!

Through His Word, the Bible, God reveals what lies ahead for this world, including the United States of America and other English-speaking nations specifically. The Bible’s promises and prophecies, including some already fulfilled, outline an inspiring, sobering and ultimately hopeful picture of what lies ahead for America and all of mankind.

In these uncertain times, you can learn the truth about the future, all laid out in the pages of the Bible. Understanding the identity of the United States in prophecy, realizing why it’s played such a leading role in the global economy, opens up doors of knowledge that will forever change how you see the world, including your own future.

Seek out what God has to say about these matters, hold fast to the direction He gives, and He will lead you to the best possible outcome. **BT**



**LEARN MORE**

What does the Bible reveal about the future of the United States and the other major English-speaking nations of the world? Download or request our eye-opening free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more!

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## Three Things You Can Do

All this economic bad news can leave us feeling depressed and overwhelmed. But you don’t have to wait for conditions to change to get on the path to economic stability. Here are three practical things you can do to weather the storm.

### (1) Create a Monthly Budget

A personal budget is crucial to getting a handle on how much money you are making and spending each month. Without preparing ahead of time what you will spend, including big bills that are coming up, it’s very difficult to make progress. Many free tools are available

that make it easy to create a budget. Don’t wait until the next crisis! Start the habit now of making and sticking to a budget.

### (2) Save!

Forcing yourself to put some of your income into an emergency fund is one of the most important ways you can prepare for difficult times. Unexpected expenses always come up, and a certain amount of savings can make all the difference. Experts recommend having at least \$1,000. Ultimately, after other goals are met, like paying off credit cards or other loans, it’s a good idea to

have around three to six months of income in the bank in case of job loss, health trials, etc.

### (3) Avoid Debt

It’s not always possible to totally avoid using credit cards or other types of debt when life hands you lemons. But credit cards should be avoided as much as possible, and paid back as soon as possible. High interest rates will suck the life out of your future financial security. If you need short-term help, it’s almost always better to have the humility to ask family members for help if they have the means. Proverbs 22:7 says that “the borrower is slave to the lender.” Debt can rob you of control over your future. To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Managing Your Finances*.

# 75 Years After Hiroshima: Real Peril, Real Hope

Seventy-five years ago, the United States waged the world's first nuclear war. Since then, eight nations have detonated 2,056 nuclear weapons, a shocking number. As one analyst warns, nations seem "willfully blind to the peril." Will humanity survive?

by Mike Snyder

**A**s the world marks the 75th anniversary of the ending of World War II with the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, what have we learned?

Consider this disturbing account concerning a nuclear test explosion nine years after Hiroshima. On the open Pacific Ocean, it resembled a mystical apparition arising opposite the morning sun. Roused from sleep, the Japanese crew of the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* tuna boat crowded on deck to witness a bizarre fireball expanding over the western horizon. A short time later, as the radiant cloud billowed higher into the morning sky, a puzzling fine chalky material began raining all over the ship and the crewmen. The baffling precipitation lasted three hours, sticking to human skin and piling up on deck.

The fine dust, known later as *shi no hai* ("ashes of death"), was highly radioactive coral debris, which had been pulverized and blasted into the atmosphere by the then-secret 15-megaton Castle Bravo test (America's largest thermonuclear weapon at the time).

Covered with the deadly ash, the entire crew fell ill with radiation sickness. Seven months later, the ship's chief radio operator, Aikichi Kuboyama, died of complications from the radiation, becoming the first victim of a next-generation hydrogen bomb. Nine years *after* Hiroshima, a Japanese citizen was *again* the victim of atomic weapons.

Since the first test explosion in July 1945, an astonishing 2,056 nuclear devices have been detonated by nine nations. What has this produced?

The Castle Bravo nuclear detonation described above caused the worst radiological disaster in U.S. history—worse even than the former Soviet Union's Chernobyl accident—raining radioactive debris nearby and in lower levels over much of the world.

In 1961, Soviet military nuclear scientists exploded the largest device in history—the incomprehensible 50-megaton "Tsar Bomba"—chilling even the hardiest of people at the height of the Cold War. Test after nuclear test has blasted massive earthen cavities and heaved multiple tons of radioactive debris into the atmosphere.

Today some 15,000 nuclear weapons exist, with about 9,400 in military arsenals (the remainder are retired or technologically obsolete, awaiting dismantling). Russia holds the most at 4,300, with the United States not far behind at about 4,000.

And what about other nations with operational nuclear weaponry? Besides Russia and America, publicly known nuclear weapons are held (or capable of being produced) by the United Kingdom, China, France, Israel, Pakistan, India, North Korea and possibly Iran.

All this raises the specter of the unthinkable happening—a worldwide nuclear holocaust. Experts estimate that between 100 million and 270 million people would horrifically die within the first hours of a full-scale mutual thermonuclear exchange between Russia and the United States—to be followed by the *complete extinction of humanity* within a few years.

This leads us to consider: *How in the world did we get here?* And, more importantly, *where do we go from here?* Do we face the future with despair or with hope?

## Technology arms race—75 years ago

Here's a short history.

The sailors who caught a glimpse of the enigmatic metal box being welded to the deck of the *U.S.S. Indianapolis* on July 16, 1945—the same day an atomic bomb was first successfully tested 1,100 miles away in New Mexico—had no idea what its mysterious contents held. As they sailed out of San Francisco Bay, few knew that onboard was a high-tech weapon that would instantly incinerate some 70,000 people in Hiroshima 20 days later.

The weapon was the result of an unprecedented technological, industrial and manufacturing leap. Six years earlier, a letter written by Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard and signed by Albert Einstein changed the course of human history. In early 1939, German scientists had formally confirmed the discovery of nuclear fission. By literally "splitting the atom" in a subatomic chain reaction, enormous energy could be released.

Alarmed, several European and American physicists and



## Can a Nation Turn Back to God?

God makes His standards of behavior—and the consequences for violating those standards—crystal clear in the pages of the Bible. God demonstrates time and again that His standards of behavior—summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and what Jesus Christ described as the two “great commandments” (see Mark 12:29-31)—exist for the good of humanity. When practiced, they lead to a far higher quality of life, both now and in the life to come.

God allows free will, the capacity for men and women to make choices. God invites, even commands, people to choose life and the pathway that leads to life. But He allows people to make wrong choices—and suffer the consequences, even through succeeding generations.

Much of the Bible represents a call to action to turn to His way of life, both on a national scale and individually.

Happily, the Bible records several instances where people—both collectively as a nation and personally—heeded this divine call to action. People chose to give up their old way of living and began to “think differently”—the Greek word translated “repent” actually meaning to *change one’s mind*. When they changed the way they were thinking, surrendered to God and reformed their behavior, amazing things happened.

But is this limited to God’s chosen nation of Israel? What about other nations or peoples?

God’s standards are omnipresent. His way of life is a *living* way. And the Bible records God’s intervention and pronouncements involving empires and countries large and small. Moreover, God has preserved a specific and important example of another nation humbling itself before Him.

This example is that of a major economic and societal power of biblical times—ancient Nineveh. Nineveh represents one of the oldest and greatest cities of the ancient world. It served as the capital of the Assyrian Empire, reaching its zenith around 700 B.C.

But during that time, in the face of the cruel actions of the city and its inhabitants, God sent a prophet to declare the depravity of the city’s transgressions and announce coming divine judgment. His instructions to the prophet are preserved for us: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2, English Standard Version).

God sent the prophet Jonah, whose mission and existence was validated by none other than Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 12:39-42). Jonah came to that great ancient city and declared its soon-coming demise: “Yet forty days, and *Nineveh shall be overthrown*” (Jonah 3:4, ESV, emphasis added throughout).

Then something amazing happened: “The people of Nineveh *believed God*” (verse 6). Alarmed at the prospect of suffering vast destruction, the entire city—“from the greatest of them to the least”—took part in a citywide fast. The people were committed to showing God they were willing to change. The king even issued a proclamation commanding the city’s inhabitants to “call out mightily to God” (verse 8). His directive? “*Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.*”

Even though Nineveh’s doom had been declared, the king hoped: “Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish” (verse 9).

The result? “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, *and he did not do it*” (verse 10). The people of the great city of Nineveh presented themselves before God in a repentant attitude and were spared!

As Jesus Himself confirmed, “The men of Nineveh . . . repented [changed their mind and behavior] at the preaching of Jonah” (Matthew 12:41, ESV). Jesus does not refer to the “fairy tale of Jonah.” He confirms that everything in the book of Jonah is *real history*—it really happened!

The same is true today! Any nation or peoples—whether in the Americas, Europe, Asia or Africa—can save themselves by turning to God. “I have no pleasure in the death of *anyone*, declares the Lord God; so turn, *and live*” (Ezekiel 18:32, ESV).

Even though the Bible prophesies economic calamity and widespread destruction before the return of Jesus Christ, God provides a way out or through. While these words were specifically given to Israel, they apply to all of mankind: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and *turn* from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and *heal their land*” (2 Chronicles 7:14, ESV).

What about you? Don’t wait for others in your nation to turn and seek God. As the apostle Peter urges you and everyone in Acts 2:40 (ESV), “*Save yourselves* from this crooked generation!”

other scientists were deeply concerned. After a delay caused by the German invasion of Poland, the now-famous Einstein letter finally made its way into the hands of President Franklin Roosevelt on Oct. 11, 1939.

Roosevelt understood the gravity of the situation immediately. The Nazis could not be the first to develop an atomic weapon.

The president promptly set in motion what became known as the “Manhattan Project,” eventually employing more than 120,000 people, to build the first operational nuclear weapon.

Nearly six years later, the New Mexico test with a dense sphere of 13.6 pounds of plutonium-239 heralded in the nuclear age. On July 16, 1945, the “Gadget,” as the test device was called, produced a destructive 22-kiloton blast that shattered windows more than 100 miles away in America’s sparsely populated Southwest.

### 20th-century nuclear war

The first use of an atomic weapon in warfare commenced a few weeks later on August 6. A modified B-29 Superfortress bomber dropped the first such bomb (named “Little Boy”) on Hiroshima, a Japanese city of some 340,000 people with industrial and military significance.

At 8:15 a.m., 141 lbs. of uranium-235 explosively slammed together, blazed supercritical and detonated at 1,900 feet above the city. Around 30 percent of the populace, 70,000 people, were instantly killed by the blast and radioactive fire. About 70 percent of the city’s buildings were annihilated, even though only a fraction of the uranium (1.7 percent) actually reached critical mass. Thousands more later died painfully of radiation poisoning, burns and related injuries.

The next day President Harry Truman confirmed both America’s new nuclear capacity and the bombing. In a radio broadcast, the president said: “The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima . . . We knew that our enemies were on the search for it. We know now how close they were to finding it. And we knew the disaster which would come to this nation, and to all peace-loving nations, to all civilization, if they had found it first . . . We won the race of discovery against the Germans.”

### “The danger of total destruction”

Yet, *even then*, the American president recognized the deadly threat such weapons posed to *all* of human civilization. He warned: “The atomic bomb is *too*



## Jesus foretold a time of great upheaval that only the use of nuclear weapons could bring about—a time shortly before He returns!

*dangerous to be loose in a lawless world.* That is why Great Britain, Canada and the United States, who have the secret of its production, do not intend to reveal that secret until means have been found to control the bomb so as to protect ourselves and the rest of the world *from the danger of total destruction*” (emphasis added throughout).

Two days later, loaded with the plutonium-fueled “Fat Man” bomb, a second B-29 flew over the Japanese city of Nagasaki. The 11 lbs. of plutonium went supercritical at 1,650 feet. At least 35,000 Japanese civilians died instantly in blazing radioactive horror.

Japan formally surrendered a few days later. In his broadcast of capitulation, Emperor Hirohito recognized the new nuclear threat’s potential of the “total extinction of human civilization.”

The Soviet Union then quickly accelerated its nuclear research program, aided in part by Soviet spies who had infiltrated U.S. top secret research facilities. Four years later, the world reeled in shock on Aug. 29, 1949, at the first successful Soviet nuclear test. Three years after that, the United Kingdom, as a joint participant in the American Manhattan Project, independently detonated its first nuclear weapon in a remote area of Australia.

The deadly nuclear arms race was on.

Importantly, ominous words from the Bible now powerfully came to life. Jesus Christ had foretold a “time of calamity” so destructive that, if not stopped, “not a single person will survive” (Matthew 24:21-22, New Living Translation). The potential expressed in these ancient words had now become reality!

### What now?

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many were gripped by anxiety over the threat of nuclear devastation. Millions of school children practiced survival drills. Public “Fallout Shelters” were stocked and openly marked. Families built bomb shelters. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev almost daily threatened potential atomic war. The United States and Soviet Union faced down each other in a war of words and of nuclear deployment. Missile sites with operational nuclear weapons were established in Turkey by America, then in Cuba by the Russians. Nerves were frayed. Live nuclear exchanges were barely avoided.

Today, the perceived threat of nuclear war has faded. Even the fabled Doomsday Clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has been shifted in some of its focus to the threat of climate change.

Even though many express grave concern about the potential threats of nuclear terrorism and atomic saber-rattling by small nations like North Korea, others seem more worried by pandemics like the coronavirus or economic recovery. As *Foreign Affairs* magazine recently declared, people seem “willfully blind to the peril” of nuclear-fueled extinction.

But the threat certainly remains. The international Union of Concerned Scientists issued a new call for peace for the 75th anniversary of Hiroshima. It formally reads in part: “Nuclear

weapons are the ‘weapons of the devil.’

They could wipe out the human race and all other creatures. They could destroy the environment and turn the globe into a dead planet.”

### The short-term threat is real

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus was teaching His disciples from the Mount of Olives overlooking the Kidron Valley and the magnificent Jerusalem temple. As He presented His longest recorded prophecy (Matthew 24), He had much to say about our present age.

He outlined a critical sequence of events that would lead to global disruption and cataclysmic upheaval, as noted earlier. But it certainly wasn’t all bad news. This coming traumatic time, rendered in some English translations as “the great tribulation,” would be resolved by the spectacular establishment of the long-awaited Kingdom of God.

Indeed, this Kingdom, the ultimate hope of *all* humanity, will be ushered in with the open triumphal return of Jesus—then as King of Kings and Lord of Lords—to the very mountaintop from which He was then speaking.

The events Jesus described, as well as many other dramatic statements throughout the Bible, tell of tumultuous and massive upheaval, even the death of billions of people. Only the use of nuclear weapons matches the horrific scope of what is often described.

Why is this important? *These times are ahead of us.* If trends continue and nations and people continue to move away from the revealed truth of God, life will grow very difficult—even to the point of literal human extinction. But you and whole communities, even whole nations, can seek to turn their lives around, focused on what God has revealed. (See “Can a Nation Turn Back to God?” on page 26.)

Difficult times lie ahead. But there is real hope—hope beyond a nuclear doomsday. May God speed His coming Kingdom! **BT**

### LEARN MORE



There is much more to this story that you need to know! If you’re interested in learning more—and you should be—download or request our Bible study guide *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* A free copy is waiting for you!

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## Protests, rioting and serious calls to defund police

The horrifying death on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis of 46-year-old black man George Floyd after a white police officer knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes led to protests across the United States and in other countries against racial injustice and police brutality. Sadly, many of these protests turned into rioting and wanton destruction and looting of businesses, with cities on fire.

Significant factors in this were wall-to-wall coverage by an agenda-driven media and the coordinating efforts of radical agitators. The latter goaded others into destruction and even had bricks, gasoline, fire-bombs and other material brought into targeted sites ahead of protests for this purpose.

While the protests were decrying injustice, the riots devolved into terrible injustice themselves. Part of the fault here was that of government not applying equal application of the law in allowing looters to destroy businesses and buildings. People argue that this is only property, not people's lives. But destroying people's livelihoods does destroy lives in many ways over time. And during the rioting there were several severe beat-

ings and many people actually killed—21 as of June 8, a few who were trying to protect others and some who were just innocent bystanders. Making matters worse, many who were arrested were immediately released, enabling them to commit further crimes.

One of the more disturbing aspects of what happened was that even among more peaceful protesters a popular chant taken up was “Defund the police,” the mantra that leaders of Black Lives Matter have a petition for on their website. They want to eliminate the police everywhere and replace them with some kind of public safety advocacy.

This is not a new idea. It is one that anarchists and extremists have trumpeted for some time. And now the idea is gaining traction. On June 7 a majority of the Minneapolis city council announced that it had a veto-proof majority to push disbanding the police department.

It should be considered that despite the many faults of human government, the one thing we expect from it is the maintenance of law and order. The apostle Paul even referred to the abusive Roman state in these

terms: “Everyone must submit to governing authorities . . . Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong . . .” (Romans 13:1-7, New Living Translation). Without law and order, the result would be warlords and mob rule.

Of course, eliminating the police would not happen in the more affluent communities. It is the poorer urban communities run by liberal-leaning politicians that would more likely see the police departments defunded—when these are the communities most in need of police. These places would be turned into gang-ruled war zones. And nearby community police forces would have to help—because they wouldn’t want problems spilling over into their neighborhoods. Even still, the skyrocketing crime in the places without police would not be contained there. This is a recipe for utter disaster.

## Chinese government culpability in pandemic and fallout

In a business show interview, former White House political strategist Steve Bannon laid out a compelling case for the complicity of the Chinese communist government in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people around the world from the Covid-19 pandemic and the devastation to the global economy that resulted (interview with Maria Bartiromo, Fox News, April 17, 2020).

As Mr. Bannon demonstrated, the Chinese government had known by at least early December 2019 of human-to-human spread of the virus and had blocked travel from the outbreak center to other parts of China. But, and this is critical, *China made a calculated decision to cover up the outbreak from the world.* Chinese virologists attempting to warn about the outbreak were punished, some even disappearing.

Bannon noted that if China had let the world know by the end of December, perhaps 95 percent of the global transmission wouldn’t have happened. But China’s government determined it was in its own national interest for other countries around the world to suffer the effects of the pandemic and not China alone.

Bannon made a careful distinction between the hundreds of thousands of innocent Chinese people who were spreading the virus around the world and their communist government, which he stated had blood on its hands. All of this came under further investigation, with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo later placing blame on China for its actions and intentional misdirection.

There are several important takeaways from what’s happened:

One is that consideration of political systems is not just “politics,” as many think. Huge moral considerations are at work. History has shown that communism kills and devastates lives for those who live under it and, as we see in this case, abroad. It is a system based on lies, theft and coveting—violations of God’s law—and what the Chinese state has done has resulted in killing and massively robbing people the world over.

We can see what a lie told to protect one’s own standing and image can do. Lies do great harm to others and to those who perpetrate them. China’s reputation has grossly suffered.

We can further see in what happened the failure of people to learn from the mistakes of history. Trusting totalitarian regimes to give honest reporting can be cataclysmically dangerous.

One news commentator pointed out: “These were highly familiar moves. The first reflex of the Chinese government is always to lie in order to hide failure and avoid embarrassment. In 2003, for example, the Chinese government lied about the initial outbreak of SARS, another coronavirus. In July of 2011 two passenger trains traveling in opposite directions smashed into each other at high speed . . . on a railroad bridge. Four cars derailed and tumbled to the ground below. Within hours authorities arrived with backhoes. They pushed the passenger cars into a pit and began covering them with dirt. By some accounts there were still survivors inside at the time . . . Chinese media, meanwhile, were ordered to ignore the crash entirely except, quote, ‘for positive news or that news issued by authorities.’ This was the template for China’s official response to the Wuhan virus” (Tucker Carlson, April 18, 2020).

Sadly, so much of the mainstream media in the United States and other countries are still quick to embrace and pass on Chinese propaganda, in part due to heavy financial ties to China.

Further, the West failed to really count the cost when it started relying so much on China for cheap supplies and manufacturing and commercial involvement. It all looked like such good deals—but the cost was ultimately a lot higher than anyone imagined it would be.

Looking ahead, we see that while China will remain a major player in Asia, its dreams of dominating the world are being dashed by what’s happened. Not only is there mistrust of China everywhere, but nations will be taking steps to secure themselves against reliance on China. The gains China had made in international relations are being eroded by all this. It appears we will see continuing dominance by the English-speaking nations for the near future, though Bible prophecy informs us of eventual global domination by Europe rather than China.

# Coronavirus: Is the cure worse than the disease?

In late March the United States implemented stay-at-home and social distancing rules to slow the spread of the new coronavirus—to “flatten the curve” so that medical facilities would not be overwhelmed. It is possible that some slowing of the spread was accomplished, but some contend that the virus was already spreading too significantly before President Trump banned travel from China at the end of January and from Europe in mid-March.

If so, that would actually mean that the virus is not nearly as dangerous as it was assumed to be early on. In fact, that seems to be the case anyway. It is by far mostly those elderly in nursing homes or those who are on the verge of needing such care who are in danger of dying from Covid-19.

In America approximately half of the fatalities have been in nursing homes. In Canada it was 80 percent. If nursing home deaths are not figured in, the danger to the rest of the population is shown to be greatly reduced. (Sadly, many nursing homes were not adequately protected to start with, allowing greater spread of the virus. And in New York, the state government ordered nursing homes to accept Covid-19 patients, resulting in thousands more deaths.)

It's been found that children are very unlikely to get this disease or to spread it to others, and yet schools remained shut down until the end of the school year, and some talk of continuing that—making it impossible for parents of these children who don't work from home to return to their jobs. Even Dr. Anthony Fauci, a champion of social distancing, has said that children need to return to school.

Strangely, many political leaders who continued to impose strict lockdowns through May and June and who called for longer delays in reopening businesses and allowing churches to assemble and even outdoor gatherings nevertheless promoted and even joined the massive and overcrowded protests sparked by the death of George Floyd in late May. This should serve as proof that these leaders are not as concerned about the virus as they claim to be.

So what has been wrought by the shutdown? Whether it has actually done much to save lives is unclear. But what is definitely clear is that it has done a great deal of harm.

There has been a vast and untold destruction of

livelihoods and futures. Some counter that this is just being focused on money and the economy. But it needs to be understood that economic concerns are actually over people's lives being at stake over the long term and the short term. Political leaders shut down their states on the grounds that not shutting down would mean some would die. Yet if shutting down businesses and destroying jobs leads to massive loss of income and years of retirement savings wiped out for millions of people, many of those affected may not be able to

more people than the virus itself. The United Nations predicts that a global recession will reverse a three-decade trend in rising living standards and plunge as many as 420 million people into extreme poverty . . . Hunger is already rising in the poorest parts of the world, where lockdowns and social distancing measures have erased incomes and put even basic food items out of reach” (Kate Linthicum, Nabih Bulos and Ana Ionova, “The Economic Devastation Wrought by the Pandemic Could Ultimately Kill More People Than the Virus Itself,”

*The Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 2020).

In many places a proliferation of unreasonable government restrictions has led to people being arrested and jailed for violations. Yet at the same time, inmates who've committed serious crimes are released.

A concerned editor commented that through



Government-mandated “social distancing” has been widely ignored by recent protestors and government officials alike—raising the question of why these same officials ordered distancing in the first place.

claiming they might get coronavirus while incarcerated, “career dangerous criminals are being marched out of the jails and prisons in astounding numbers. According to UCLA, which is tracking this data, 67,000 criminals have been released throughout the 50 states. The majority of the criminals, 43,000 of them, have been released from the nation's jails, and 24,356 were released from prisons. Consequently, given that we know the shocking degree of recidivism even among criminals more carefully selected for release, we can add victims of crime due to coronavirus jailbreak as the latest long-term death toll from COVID-19, or at least from the governmental reaction to it” (Daniel Horowitz, “67K Criminals Released So Far Under Coronavirus Jailbreak,” *Conservative Review*, May 22, 2020). He goes on to show that the actual threat of Covid-19 does not warrant these releases. This has much more to do with political ideology about the need to free criminals.

Added to the long-term human cost is the fact that many people have already died because of the shutdowns or may yet in the near term. Suicide hotlines have received many times their normal call volume. A May 26 *Washington Post* headline reported that with the coronavirus pandemic, “A Third of Americans Now Show Signs of Clinical Anxiety or Depression”—a huge jump from earlier surveys. Another headline reported, “Record Number of Suicides: ‘We’ve Seen a Year’s Worth of Suicide Attempts in Four Weeks’” (Lionel Du Cane, National File, May 23, 2020).

Routine medical treatments and screenings have dropped immensely due to the shutdown. Think about a doctor saying, “We caught that cancer (or other serious ailment) just in time.” Sadly, this has been said far less in recent months—with terrible consequences.

Poorer nations may fare far worse. The United Nations is warning that “the economic devastation the pandemic wreaks on the ultra-poor could ultimately kill

claiming they might get coronavirus while incarcerated, “career dangerous criminals are being marched out of the jails and prisons in astounding numbers. According to UCLA, which is tracking this data, 67,000 criminals have been released throughout the 50 states. The majority of the criminals, 43,000 of them, have been released from the nation's jails, and 24,356 were released from prisons. Consequently, given that we know the shocking degree of recidivism even among criminals more carefully selected for release, we can add victims of crime due to coronavirus jailbreak as the latest long-term death toll from COVID-19, or at least from the governmental reaction to it” (Daniel Horowitz, “67K Criminals Released So Far Under Coronavirus Jailbreak,” *Conservative Review*, May 22, 2020). He goes on to show that the actual threat of Covid-19 does not warrant these releases. This has much more to do with political ideology about the need to free criminals.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. No doubt we will learn of more damage going forward. God warned in the Scriptures that as nations depart from His laws they fall under curses, including confusion and making bad decisions.

## How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. These eye-opening presentations offer you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the **perspective of God's Word**. Visit us at [ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!](http://ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!)





### “Coping in Times of Crisis”

Your magazine is helping me deal with my fear and insecurity. I am praying for the nations of the earth, subscribers and *Beyond Today*. Thanks.

*From the Internet*

### “Covid-19 and Rampant Fear”

Thank you very much for this article. It makes me realize even more that an all-loving God, as in the days of the prophet Jeremiah, is warning us not to sin, and also not to give in to uncontrolled fear. We are human beings, and we fear when situations are very difficult. But we can remove and control this fear, for otherwise it will only become negative. This pandemic outbreak teaches us to lead a more godly and positive life.

*From the Internet*

### Thankful for *Beyond Today* resources

I would like to receive the *Beyond Today* magazine that you mentioned in your recent TV program. I am so thankful that in 2010, God showed me the truth about His Sabbath and His feasts, as well as the worldly holidays of Christmas and Easter. I was in mainstream Christian churches all of my life until then—62 years.

This journey that we are all experiencing now due to Covid-19 can be compared to the journey Israel was on when they were led by Moses from Egypt to the Promised Land. They complained a lot. God does not want us to complain, but to trust Him and follow Him on this journey. God bless you all, and everyone trust in God, our Father, and Jesus to lead and protect us.

*From the Internet*

I am so grateful for your teachings about Christ, as I am a 74-year-old convert from Islam living in London. What you said on your BT Daily “Coping With the Pandemic” was extremely important. I want very much to be able to read the transcript over and over, and let God speak to me through it, especially when I want to preach the gospel to other Muslims and non-believers.

May God bless and encourage you in your ministry, and keep you and all at *Beyond Today* (and your families) safe and protected from Covid-19.

*Viewer in the United Kingdom*

I found your website, and it’s the only one that seems to have only truth. Because of my background in the occult, I have been terrified of deception; I’ve studied, prayed and read the Bible, and always check what I read with Scripture. The things God has revealed to me is the same as I see in all the videos and articles I read in your pages so far. I’m so happy God led me to it. God bless you all so much for the great work you do. God’s grace, peace, revelation, truth, discernment, peace, joy and protection be with you all in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Reader in Norway*

I very much wish that the peace of God fills your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus in these moments of anguish and despondency. At the same time, I want to make a special recognition for the exhaustive work that *Las Buenas Noticias* [the Spanish language version of *Beyond Today*] accomplishes. In particular, I want to recognize the extensive explanation given in the last issue about what “Easter” means and its origins, since it is such a controversial—and at the same time unknown—subject.

I am sure that this study will erase all confusion and misinterpretation, and of course it gives us the sustenance to be able to speak about that subject with all the proper authority and with biblical foundation. Thank you very much, my dear friends and brothers. May our good Jesus continue to fill your minds with that wisdom that comes from above to give us and share such valuable studies.

*Subscriber in Mexico*

I just finished reading your article explaining the three days and three nights crucifixion and resurrection discrepancy. This article is the best explanation of this topic that I have ever read. Good job.

*From the Internet*

### Note of thanks for our efforts

You asked your readers what their opinion of your magazine is. It is my opinion that it is very good and well written magazine. I especially like the articles that use science against evolution and archaeology that confirms the Bible.

*Reader from Saskatchewan, Canada*

I just wanted to let you know how much I have enjoyed your study guides. They have changed my thinking so much. With a broader understanding I feel so much closer to God. It took away so much worry. I’m looking forward to receiving more study guides. God bless you for what you do. Stay safe, and as they say, “the check is in the mail.” Just wish it could be more.

*From the Internet*

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*—K.T., Facebook fan*



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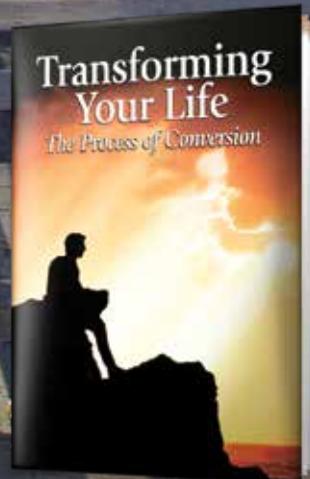
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