

BEYOND TODAY

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Keys to Coping in Troubled Times

How Can We Endure in Times of Crisis? 10 • Bible Answers for Coping With Stress 13
Baptism: Beginning of a New Life 15 • Will You Use What God Has Given? 17

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FEATURE ARTICLES

4 Keys to Coping in Troubled Times

When you face stressful, unsettling trials and troubles, how can you cope most effectively? Plus, what is genuine faith and how can it help you successfully face and overcome life's inevitable adversities?

10 How Can We Endure in Times of Crisis?

How do we keep it together in a world that's falling apart? Where do we turn? Practicing these key steps will help us cope.

13 Bible Answers for Coping With Stress

God's Word gives direct answers to many of our questions about how to deal with stress.

16 The Parable of the Talents: Will You Use What God Has Given?

Christ is preparing a people for His coming reign on earth. You have an opportunity to sign on and be a part. But that includes doing your part. What will you choose?

19 Baptism: Beginning of a New Life

To receive the greatest gifts of God, you must take a specific step—the commitment of water baptism.

21 Facing Today's Giants With God's Help

How can we push through when facing overwhelming trials?

22 America's Economic Transformation: Will It Wreck the U.S. Economy?

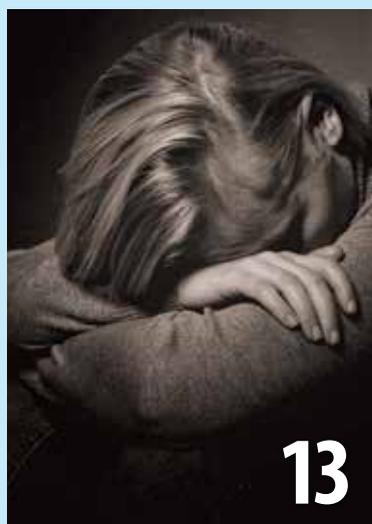
America would do well to learn an economic lesson from 3,000 years ago recorded in the pages of the Bible. It reveals the dangerous path America seems determined to follow.

28 Whom Do You Belong To?

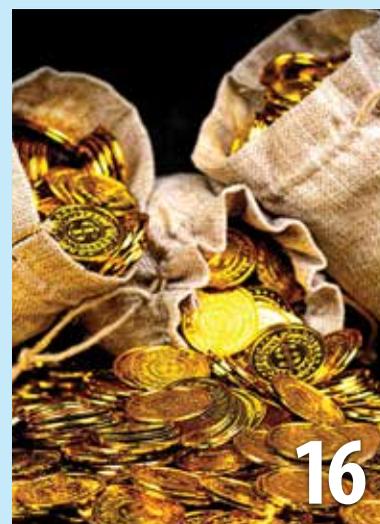
Four words on a gravestone raise a question with far-reaching and eternal consequences—to whom does your life belong?



10



13



16

DEPARTMENTS

26 Current Events and Trends

An overview of events and conditions around the world

30 Letters From Our Readers

Readers of *Beyond Today* magazine share their thoughts

31 *Beyond Today* Television Log

A listing of stations and times for the *Beyond Today* TV program



Scott Ashley
Managing editor

Faith's Hall of Fame

Hebrews 11 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It's commonly called the "faith chapter" because it summarizes the trials and triumphs of many biblical figures—men and women of great faith. These men and women put their trust in God to be with them and deliver them through all kinds of crises, some life-threatening. Their stories are filled with help and hope—especially for those going through trials (and if you're not going through trials at the moment, tomorrow is just around the corner!).

The list of heroes in this chapter begins with Abel, son of Adam and Eve, who by faith "brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did." His offering "gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts." And "although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith" (verse 4, New Living Translation throughout).

Outstanding among those listed in this chapter is Abraham. Here's the summary of his story: "It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents . . . Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God" (verses 8-10).

Abraham's story spans 14 chapters of the book of Genesis. God told him to leave the city that had been his family home for generations and journey to the land of Canaan, the area of modern-day Israel. Abraham obeyed and became a wandering stranger in that foreign land.

His life was one of many ups and downs. He was often close to God, yet at times he relied more on himself, bringing great troubles on him and those closest to him. But most important, through it all he trusted in God and believed God's promises. Through a lifetime of wandering through a distant land, he was, as we just saw, "confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God." His hope, vision and goal was the Kingdom of God.

His wife Sarah was also an example of faith. Verses 11-12 tell us: "It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a

whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them." Like Abraham, "*she believed that God would keep his promise.*" That belief in God's promises kept them going through a long life of facing challenges and problems.

Abraham's example was the pattern for other biblical heroes of faith, which is why he's often referred to as "the father of the faithful." Others followed in his footsteps—Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the biblical prophets and many more.

Through faith they accomplished great things—they "subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (verses 33-34).

But at times things didn't go so well. "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy" (verses 36-38).

Regardless of how things went for them in this life, "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (verse 13). All were like Abraham in this regard. They all knew that life in this world wasn't the goal or the end of the story. They looked for "a better, that is, a heavenly country," and "therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (verse 16).

We find great lessons in this when we're dealing with the trials of life. Regardless of how bleak and discouraging things may seem, we have a God who loves us and wants only the best for us (Romans 8:28). His desire is that we all be part of His Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Look to these examples and hold fast to these words of hope as you deal with life in these troubled times! **BT**

Keys to Coping in Troubled Times

When you face stressful, unsettling trials and troubles, how can you cope most effectively? Plus, what is genuine faith and how can it help you successfully face and overcome life's inevitable adversities?

by John LaBissoniere

At age 12 in 1961, I began delivering evening newspapers each day to about 75 homes in my community. Over the next four years I made the acquaintance of many fine neighbors, including a young family of four with two elementary-school-age girls. It was enjoyable knowing and serving that particular family since they always seemed to radiate kindness, cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

One cold winter afternoon while delivering the newspaper to their normally brightly lit home, I noticed it was unusually dark and no one was around. The next day I learned the terrible reason. The parents had been killed and their daughters seriously injured in a violent car accident. I was stunned and deeply saddened by this terrible tragedy.

In another event several months later, I returned home

one evening after completing my paper route to find one of my uncles sitting on our sofa sobbing loudly and bitterly. My mother was trying to comfort her grief-stricken brother to no avail. Mom then told me that my much-loved grandfather had suffered a massive heart attack and died. I'll never forget the stress and sorrow our entire extended family experienced due to that unexpected and heartbreaking event.

As a result of those unsettling incidents early in life, I came to see that distress could dramatically affect anyone at any time. Even the kindest, most decent people could be caught up in severe trials and adversities over which they had no control.

Perhaps you are among the many people facing various stresses, pressures and sufferings right now. If so, what are key ways you can cope? And what vital role can godly

faith play in helping you deal effectively with troubling times?

Living in a stress-filled age

There's no question we live in a stressful world that can severely affect people's mental, emotional and physical health. An article on the website of the Canadian Red Cross titled "The Impact of Stress on Your Mental Health" states:

"Stress has a psychological impact that can manifest as irritability or aggression, a feeling of loss of control, insomnia, fatigue or exhaustion, sadness or tears, concentration or memory problems, or more . . . Stress not only affects your mental health, but also your physical health. For example, it can cause increased blood pressure and a higher risk of heart disease, gastrointestinal problems (diarrhea, heartburn, stomach ulcers, etc.), headaches, and back or neck pain. It can also lead to unhealthy behaviours and addictions" (Vanessa Racine, Oct. 2, 2020). The same article further points out that "continued stress can lead to other problems, such as depression, anxiety or burnout."

Compounding the burden of daily stress that people experience has been the prolonging of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nature.com stated: "The devastation of the pandemic—millions of deaths, economic strife and unprecedented curbs on social interaction—has already had a marked effect on people's mental health" (Alison Abbott, "Covid's Mental-Health Toll: How Scientists

Are you among the many facing stress and pressure right now? What are ways you can cope? And what vital role can godly faith play in helping you deal with troubling times?

Are Tracking a Surge in Depression," Feb. 3, 2021).

In referencing mental health and other issues arising from the pandemic, a professor and director of the Traumatic Stress Clinic at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia reported: "As the pandemic enters its second year, many people will be continuing to suffer with poor mental health, or facing new mental health challenges. The effects of recurrent lockdowns, fears about the effectiveness of the vaccines, restricted movement within and beyond Australia, and the bleak economic outlook are taking their toll on psychological well-being" (Richard Bryant, "Covid's Mental Health Fallout Will Last a Long Time. Here's How We're Targeting Pandemic Depression and Anxiety," *The Conversation*, Feb. 25, 2021).

Mental health issues related to the pandemic have not been limited to adults. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

National Poll on Children's Health at Michigan Medicine reported, "Our poll suggests that pandemic-era changes may have had a significant mental health impact for some teenagers" (Robert Preidt, "Pandemic Has Harmed Mental Health of Teens," WebMD, March 15, 2021).

Adding to the everyday stress levels experienced by people in the United Kingdom, many have been encumbered by serious financial burdens due to the pandemic. A "report found that among households in which at least one person had fallen out of work, 41% of British households had suffered a severe income fall of at least 25%" (Pan Pylas, "Pandemic 'Exposed' UK Households' Finances, Report Finds," *Associated Press*, April 21, 2021).

Many people face distressing situations

The above commentaries are only a small sampling of reports from many nations about the injurious mental and physical effects of the pandemic. In addition to those troubles, people in numerous locations around the world have been affected by increased civil unrest involving large protest demonstrations, extreme violence and rapidly increasing crime rates.

Besides these extreme situations, people in every country around the globe are dealing with significant day-to-day marital, family, financial and employment dilemmas. Others are greatly distressed by health complications, chronic addictions, domestic abuse, depression, discrimination, persecution, grinding poverty or a combination of these and many other sufferings.

Indeed, you may be contending with one or more of these or other troubling, stressful circumstances yourself. If so, what can you do?

What you can control when things seem out of control

While it may not always be possible to completely change the circumstances you face, there are two elements you *can* personally control. These include *your attitude* and *your relationship with your Eternal Creator God*. Let's examine these key points. First, your attitude.

When considering this subject I recall my father's exhortation to my seven brothers and sisters and me many years ago that "attitude is everything." He reminded us frequently that "life is not always fair" and that we had a choice about how we would react to its inevitable ups and downs. We could face them in a confident, positive manner and do something about them or sink into gloomy defeatism and do nothing.

My father was a good example of one who faced life as it came. He wasn't one to complain much or become anxious when dealing with sometimes unavoidable obstacles, setbacks or mishaps. He simply accepted problems as

they were and began to logically and systematically find ways to resolve them. His words and example proved beneficial to us, especially as we grew into adulthood.

However, in today's society it seems that many people can't handle the fact that life can be inequitable at times. Rather than dealing head-on with difficulties and doing what's necessary to tackle them, they blame others for their troubles or attempt to hide or run away from personal responsibility.

Also, some people allow emotional upset to confuse their thinking and reasoning or they seek to escape their troubles through drugs, alcohol or other means. So, what about you? How can you best contend with adversity?

Optimism is important

Facing a problem squarely and rationally can help you find an effective solution or at least a way to moderate the issue's severity. You can either view your situation from a negative perspective while allowing the plight to grow worse, or you can work at resolving it in a positive, constructive manner.

Your attitude toward obstacles and challenges can make a great difference. When you are confident and optimistic, you place yourself in a better position to not only manage the situation soundly, but become a more poised and confident person in the process. *You* have the choice as to how you view the challenges you are facing and what you will do to deal with those challenges.

Sonya Lyubomirsky, a psychology professor at Stanford University, and her colleagues analyzed 225 happiness studies conducted with more than 275,000 participants. They found that "positive thinking people are physically

healthier, more productive at work, more likeable in general and live longer" (*Energy Times*, Sept. 2008). Other studies have shown that a positive attitude leads to less



Having unwavering **faith in God** is the essential key—***the dynamic spiritual component***—you need to respond productively and faithfully in troubling times.

stress, which in turn positively affects the human body in various ways.

The vital significance of genuine faith

While having a positive attitude and facing up to troubling events in your life is important, you also need another critical attribute. It involves *cultivating and maintaining a robust, close and lasting relationship with your Eternal Creator*.

This means placing faith in Him and His Word, the Bible. Why is this so crucially important? Because your human strength and resolve can take you *only so far*. However, with the tremendous help and guidance

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God can provide, you gain a huge advantage.

Having unwavering faith in Him is the essential key—the *dynamic spiritual component*—you need to respond productively and faithfully when troubling times arise. As Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, *a very present help in trouble*” (emphasis added throughout).

To many people “faith in God” could simply be defined as a belief that He exists. But that idea touches only the very surface of what genuine faith really is. The starting point for faith is made plain in Hebrews 11:6, which tells us, “He who comes to God must believe that He is, *and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.*”

Faith therefore, involves *believing and trusting God* (Hebrews 11:1). But this capability cannot be generated or “worked up” from within your heart and mind. Rather it is a divine *gift* from God (Ephesians 2:8). Once given it must be put to work. Faith cannot remain dormant. It must engender positive, productive results, since “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17-26).

Living faith requires an enduring and intimate relationship with your Creator. The life of faith, following repentance, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38), is one in which you are *actively striving* to become like your Heavenly Father in character and righteousness (see Matthew 5:48). Faith doesn’t look backward by dwelling on past sins and mistakes. Rather, it focuses, with firm confidence and resolve, on a bright, exhilarating future as a son or daughter in God’s divine family and Kingdom (see 2 Corinthians 6:18).

Genuine faith involves walking with God day by day (Micah 6:8). In doing so, you are in continuous contact with Him through prayer and know that, in due course, you will receive answers to your prayers.

Indeed, when you face troubling times you can go “boldly to the throne of grace” and “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Faith in God helps you cope with the inevitable uncertainties of life. It’s like an anchor to steady you in life’s sometimes stormy, violent seas.

Though you live in a stressful, uncertain world, you don’t have to live in doubt. Why? Because, when you have faith and act on it, you know, as the psalmist wrote, that your “help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. *He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber*” (Psalm 121:2-3).

Furthermore, as the apostle Paul wrote, “*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28).

Paul further explained that worry and apprehension are unnecessary when you have a close relationship with God: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your

Practical Ways to Manage Stress

Here are several methods to cope with stress that will help improve your daily life while building godly faith.

- **Get sufficient rest.** Attempting to function effectively without adequate rest and sleep just doesn’t work. Problems can sometimes seem insurmountable when you are overly tired and stressed. Do your best to obtain the rest you need.
- **Try a change of pace.** Take an occasional drive, go on a picnic, visit places with beautiful scenery, take a weekend vacation. A variety of activities can help relieve stress and give you a feeling of youthful vigor, even at an advanced age.
- **Get physically active.** Regular physical activity, if you are able, can offer stress relief. It can be refreshing to both your body and mind. Simply going for a relaxing walk in a park or your neighborhood can be enjoyable and invigorating.
- **Improve your diet.** Did you know that stress can lead to weight gain? Experts say it would be good to have healthy food choices such as fresh fruits and vegetables on hand when stressors arise. These are good alternatives to eating sugary and high-fat foods which are linked to excess body fat and other health problems.
- **Face your problems squarely.** Take personal responsibility to resolve stressful concerns and issues. Don’t ignore them, procrastinate or blame others. When you embrace this challenge you will experience an invaluable sense of control and accomplishment.
- **Improve time management.** Focus on what is most important. Spend time with your family. Make friendships that will last a lifetime. Help coworkers, neighbors and others when needs arise. Take time for close, regular contact with God through prayer and Bible study.
- **Change your way of thinking.** With God’s help, meditate on what’s positive and uplifting. Make it a priority to build holy, righteous character and faithfulness toward your Creator who gave you your life and graciously sustains it.
- **Focus on the future.** Avoid reflecting on the stressful and frustrating past you may have experienced. Rather, prepare diligently for your part in God’s soon-coming Kingdom, which will faithfully govern all people in righteousness throughout the world.

When you deal successfully with stress while developing godly faith, you can be a positive example to your family and all others who know you!

requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

How can you obtain the peace of mind God generously offers? Again, the key is combining an optimistic attitude with living faith in Him and obedience to His commandments (Romans 8:6; 15:13; Colossians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:22; Psalm 119:165).

Examples of biblical faith

As a prime example of living faith, young David of ancient Israel confronted and defeated the Philistine giant Goliath in a one-on-one battle. While professional soldiers shrank away in fear, the shepherd boy David demonstrated complete faith and confidence in God and His unconquerable power to overcome any obstacle. He didn't let dismal thoughts, negative emotions or fear about Goliath's size or strength dissuade him, because he knew God was far stronger and more powerful (see 1 Samuel 17:24-48).

This was the same attitude demonstrated by David's descendant King Hezekiah. In a terrifying situation, the vastly superior army of the Assyrian empire threatened to annihilate the nation of Judah and enslave its people.

What was Hezekiah's response to this peril? He told his fellow citizens, “Be strong and courageous; *do not be afraid nor dismayed* before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; *for there are more with us than with him*. With him is an arm of flesh; *but with*

us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32:7-8).

Because the king and the people put their full faith in God and humbly prayed to Him for their defense, He responded by supernaturally destroying “every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain” of the invading army (verse 21). If God did this for the entire nation of Judah, will He not help *you* in an appropriate way when *you* face *any* personal trial, trouble or affliction?

Through faith in God's all-powerful strength, *you* can stand strong and not shrink back, prevailing against life's many stresses. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10). Every time you face troubling events, you can seek God in faithful prayer, asking Him to be your first line of defense.

If you do this and remain faithful and obedient, continuing to rely on His help, He promises to give you the spiritual stamina to hold on and triumph (1 Corinthians 10:12-13). He will assist you in facing and resolving problems that seem to defy human logic or solutions.

These issues may include family, personal, financial, employment or health-related troubles. One might involve your deepest heartache and despair after the death of a loved one. One could entail your hurt and distress after the betrayal or duplicity of a mate or a good friend.

No matter the breadth or depth of your suffering or sorrow, if you continue to obey God and diligently

Developing Faithfulness and Resilience

Faithfulness is the quality of being devoted, dependable and trustworthy. And one definition of resilience is the ability to adjust to or recover from adversity. When faithfulness toward God and resilience are united together you can better weather life's inevitable storms. Not only will you find great meaning and purpose in your life through a relationship with God, but with His tremendous help and comfort, you can bounce back from the setbacks you experience. Here are three ways to aid you in developing faithfulness and resilience.

1. Discover and pursue God's great purpose

You are more than a physical and psychological being. You are *also* an amazing *spiritual* creation. To discover and pursue your divine purpose, you must look *beyond* your earthly interests and goals. Seek out and devote your-

self to your Eternal Creator who sincerely desires to have a personal relationship with you. When you pray to Him and study His Word, the Bible, you will learn about His great plan for all humanity. As you discover more about your bright, exciting future in God's coming Kingdom, your faithfulness to Him will grow and you will find it easier to be resilient when contending with life's troubles. (To learn more, download or request our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*)

2. Take personal responsibility

Since God has given you the gift of life, take personal responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings and actions. Resist the common tendency in today's society to see yourself as a victim due to other people's actions. Although you cannot always control events, you can be resilient in how you react to them. Ask God in prayer to help you deal with anger, hurt and

other negative emotions. Study the Bible's many examples of how the people of God faced numerous difficulties and yet, in deep faithfulness, relied on Him for His mighty support and guidance. Apply these lessons to your difficult situations and see the outstanding and, yes, even miraculous results.

3. Connect with others

Being close to family and friends can help sustain you when life's dilemmas bear down on you. Studies have shown that resilient people have at least one other person to interface with. Be sure to take the time to develop close connections with positive, encouraging individuals. Ultimately, it's your constructive interactions with other people and your intimate relationship with God and faithfulness to Him that will help you maintain your footing in troublesome times.



No matter the breadth or depth of your suffering or sorrow, if you continue to obey God and diligently seek His help through fervent prayer, He will help you, strengthen you and rescue you.

seek His help through fervent prayer, He will help you, strengthen you and rescue you. As Psalm 34:19 explains, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, *but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*”

God will help you handle the unforeseen

Certainly unexpected, traumatic events can instantly leave you feeling panicked, boxed in and alone (Psalms 38:21; 119:8). However, you can fully rely on your Heavenly Father to aid you in *any* shocking, unforeseen situation (see Psalm 91).

In experiencing such events you may not see any apparent way out. Yet God does! He will show you the way! “But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out” (1 Corinthians 10:13, Good News Translation).

This spiritual principle was illustrated in the story of another biblical figure, the ancient patriarch Job. Having endured the sudden death of his children and the swift loss of nearly all his earthy possessions, his immediate

discouragement was obvious as he “tore his robe, and shaved his head” in signs of mourning (Job 1:20).

But Job endured. What kept him going? It was his profound love and deep respect for His great Creator. Throughout Job’s long, intense trial he never lost faith.

Of course, just as in Job’s case, it would be vital for you to remember that God may not always respond immediately in the way you are asking to resolve the troubles you are undergoing. At times He may decide to have you wait patiently for an answer. But why? To strengthen your faith and build your character (Psalm 37:7-9; Jeremiah 17:10; Romans 5:3-4). Nevertheless, He is faithful to give you the assistance you need.

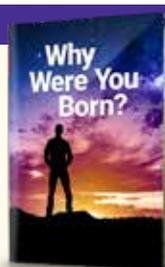
The apostle Peter understood this and, while comforting and encouraging fellow Christians who were “grieved by various trials,” pointed out that “*when your faith remains strong* through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Peter 1:7, New Living Translation).

Whether you suffer a long, debilitating illness, lose a loved one to death, see a job or career end much earlier than expected, experience an economic reversal that leaves you facing harsh financial conditions, or any

other bad circumstance, you can be richly confident that God will *never let you down*. Deuteronomy 31:8 offers this wonderful promise: “And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. *He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.*”

So, just like David, Hezekiah and Job, you have a *choice* about what you’ll do when you meet the unavoidable stresses and strains of life. It’s not a question of *whether* you’ll encounter difficult times, because they *will* come. Rather, your well-being in life *has everything to do with how you respond to these difficulties*. You can immobilize yourself in self-pity, victimhood and despair *or* you can be positive and optimistic while calling on the immeasurable resources and tremendous love of your Heavenly Father (Hebrews 4:16).

What choice will *you* make? God awaits your answer! **BT**



LEARN MORE

A powerful key to coping with stress and trials is to understand the purpose and meaning of life—why we are here! You need to understand what the Bible reveals about your awesome future! To learn more, request our free study guide *Why Were You Born?*

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How Can We Endure in Times of Crisis?

How do we keep it together in a world that's falling apart?
Where do we turn? Practicing these key steps will help us cope.

by Roy Fouch

We are living in an age of misinformation, confusion and fear inspired by the father of lies, Satan the devil. Another aspect of his malicious character is creating division among people. Race, ethnicity, political perspectives and religious beliefs have often been divisive factors used by him to turn one group against another. And now we see animosity increasing, just as the Bible warned of the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-5). (See “The Instigator of Evil and Confusion” on page 12.)

Today, during this period of the pandemic and cultural upheaval, we see division everywhere. There's growing anger and conflict. Murders are on the rise, as are mass shootings, suicide, domestic violence and other violations of God's laws, called sin.

The whole world is experiencing an upsurge of pain and suffering. Our lives have been significantly impacted by current events. Some have died from the pandemic, lost loved ones or lost jobs, housing or resources once readily available. Lifestyles have been negatively impacted, not to mention how relationships have been altered by distancing and isolation.

As a result, many are grieving these losses and experiencing depression, anger, projection of blame, and denial as to the real causes of these events. Anxiety, fear and feelings of uncertainty are abounding. How do we deal with such crisis?

Look to our primary allies in coping with anxiety

The first and most important aspect of what we can do is to strengthen our relationship with our foremost allies, God the Father and Jesus Christ. Christ is our counselor, our friend, our confidant, our encourager and comforter. God the Father is a perfect, all-loving father. These all-powerful Beings will fight our battles for us and see us through the most trying circumstances. They will strengthen us through Their Word, the Holy Bible, and

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like any meaningful relationship, we must spend time with Them to build the relationship. Prayer is our communication to God. And the Bible is the primary way God speaks to us. Fasting intensifies our closeness to God, and meditating on His Word helps us gain a deeper understanding of what He is communicating to us. (Download or request our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth* to learn more.)

God's Word has much to say on coping with anxiety and worry.

How should a person manage anxiety? Philippians 4:6-8 gives us a perfect outline, telling us:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

If we break this down, these are the key points: We humbly pray to our Heavenly Father and make our requests known, and we give thanks for the things He and His Son have blessed us with. Knowing we have given our concerns and worries to God (see also 1 Peter 5:7), and knowing God will do what is in our best interest, will give us peace of mind. And lastly, our minds need to be focused on the positive things God has shared with us through His Word and the beauty of His creation and the hope that lies ahead.

Our negative thoughts are often what produce in us anxious feelings and fears. Change your thinking and follow these guidelines and anxiety will be greatly reduced in your life.



Strive to be peacemakers

Next, I would like to share with you some proactive strategies that will enhance the quality of your life and the life of others. The first of these is being a peacemaker in a world of conflict and contention. Jesus Christ in His Sermon on the Mount reminds us: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). The apostle Paul instructs us, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).

The world around us is rife with conflicting opinions and controversies. And there is a great deal of misinformation we ourselves may be susceptible to. We need not engage in every argument. Of course we should take a stand against what we see as destructive of people’s lives. Yet not every matter is clear. Where it is, we may need to speak out, yet we should still be careful in what we say. What is very clear is that Satan is hard at work trying to

cause division in the world, in our country, church and families.

So let’s look at how to pursue peace. Peace always has as one of its main tenets the well-being of others and oneself. Peace is the fruit sown by the Holy Spirit and is achieved through righteous discipline. The phrase “holding your peace” relates to the idea that you often must choose not to react to someone who may aggravate you or be verbally aggressive with you. It often takes self-discipline to not react in kind or overly emotionally.

Being a peacemaker is an active and ongoing process. James 3:18 states, “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” If we are to sow righteousness in the world, it must be done in a peaceful manner, not in contention, hostility or conflict. Conflict is simply having differences in opinion, goals, needs and desires. Contention, on the other hand, is disagreement plus a wrathful spirit or quarrelsome method.

While there is much to be righteously indignant or justly angry about, as God is, we must not let that consume and control us (Ephesians 4:26-27). “He who is slow to anger allays contention” (Proverbs 15:18; compare 14:29; James 1:19). (See “Coping With Anger” on this page for some practical tips.)

Again, we are to be sowing righteousness in our relationships with others, including our families, the church, our neighbors and our community. Christ stated in Matthew 5:44-45: “But 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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust” (compare 1 Peter 3:8-9).

Of course, Jesus also noted that conflict is sometimes unavoidable, stating that He did not come to bring peace but a sword to set even families against one another, figuratively speaking (Matthew 10:34-37). The truth itself is often divisive, but as Paul said, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).

Being a peacemaker means taking the initiative to restore broken or damaged relationships, even when the major rupture lies with the other person. This often requires an act of humility. Being humble puts you in the right frame of heart when trying to restore broken relationships. You can diffuse arguments and break down barriers of defensiveness when you are humble. Paul describes this attitude in Philippians 2:3: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (New International Version, 1984).

Humility also recognizes that you need God’s help in resolving past hurts and brokenness. In Matthew 11:29, Christ states, “I am gentle and humble in heart”

Coping With Anger

Here are some basic strategies to handle anger:

- Exercise can help reduce the emotions related to anger.
- Take time-outs and remove yourself from an emotionally charged situation to allow the emotions to die down so you can think more clearly.
- Be a good listener. Make sure you understand the other person’s perspective and feelings before you react to what you think you’ve heard.
- Pray before entering into a difficult conversation, and be willing to extend grace, mercy and forgiveness, the very things God extends to you.
- Choose your words wisely and do not use harsh or derogatory words.
- Pursue activities that help to reduce your stress level.

The Instigator of Evil and Confusion

We are living in troubled times. But just what is the source of these troubles? If we go back to the beginning of mankind, we can see who the instigator is—the serpent in the Garden of Eden, who encouraged disobedience to God. He is later identified as Satan the devil, who continues to deceive and influence humanity (Revelation 12:9; 1 John 5:19).

Jesus called him the father of lies, telling people who sought to kill Him: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources,

for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). Lies are at the root of troubled times.

God is assuredly not the author of all the confusion we see (1 Corinthians 14:33). Rather, Satan as the deceiver and tempter is to blame—as are all who succumb to his influence.

Why are we seeing an increase in troubles now? Jesus Christ will return to the earth very soon. When that happens, Satan’s rule on earth will be over, and the consequences of his rebellion and the pain and suffering he has caused humanity will be brought to an end.

Revelation 20:1-3 describes one of the events that will occur when Christ returns: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having

the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.” Verses 7-10 further relate the ultimate demise of Satan, when his deception and misdirection of humanity will at last cease.

As the end approaches, Satan knows his time is growing shorter. So he is stepping up his efforts—a precursor to his extreme final wrath when he is cast down from a last ditch assault on heaven just a few years before Christ’s return (see Revelation 12:7-12).

(NIV). That’s the approach we must also have.

Comfort and encourage one another

Another proactive strategy is comforting and encouraging others. In a world that’s becoming increasingly violent under Satan’s dark influence, the world needs beacons of light. It needs peacemakers to show the world a better approach to resolving conflicts, contentions and hostilities.

It behooves us to stand for what’s ultimately important amid the frenzy of worldly perspectives around us. When we are told not to be of the world, it also means not to allow worldly opinions and attitudes to shape our outlook. Rather, we must maintain a biblical perspective. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, gave us these words to comfort and guide us in this war-torn world: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

While God the Father and Christ have given us many words of comfort and encouragement in the Bible, They have also given us the great capacity to share that with others. Passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:11 remind us how important all of us are to one another in troubled times: “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (NIV).

People need the comfort of knowing that others care and will be there in time of need. Reaching out to people who are lonely and isolated, the elderly and any others who are in some way disadvantaged can help them endure these troubled times. Volunteer work has filled the gap for many who have limited resources. It benefits both the giver and the receiver and creates bonds between them both.

Those who are parents have the special responsibility of guiding their children through trying circumstances.

One final thought in how to cope in troubled times is to never lose sight of the vision God has given us of His Kingdom to come. Even when things get worse, as they will at some point, we must keep in the forefront of our minds and in our hearts the great destiny God has planned for His beloved children.

It is eloquently expressed in Revelation 21:1-4: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’”

It is the wonderful vision of the future that will help us endure the pains of the present—just as it helped Jesus endure His crucifixion (Hebrews 12:2). Always remember that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18; compare 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

And “may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10-11).

This is the truth that will see us through all troubles. Never let it go! **BT**

Bible Answers for Coping With Stress

If you're like most of us, you're feeling stress from circumstances in your life. Sometimes the stress feels unbearable. But even daily stress can take a toll. Medical professionals warn us that stress is a killer. It's a risk factor for heart disease, strokes and many other diseases. With the impact stress can have on our lives, it's important to have a biblical perspective on how to cope.

The Bible is a guidebook for dealing with life. God has provided us with this manual about how life works. As we'll see, the Bible contains practical solutions to the issues and challenges we all face, including the challenge of stress. We encourage you to always look to it for needed help. And please contact us if you would like additional information or would like to talk personally with one of our ministers.

Facing a challenging world

How would you describe the world we live in today? Challenging, fast-paced, dangerous, unstable, immoral? The apostle Paul describes the last days as "perilous times" (2 Timothy 3:1). A big result of all this is stress! We may find ourselves feeling anxious and apprehensive about how such conditions can affect us personally, leaving us stressed out.

A number of people were asked to write down some of the things that cause stress in their lives. Here are a few responses:

"The most stressful things for me are dealing with my health issues, paying bills and feeling worthless because I can no longer do what I used to do."

"I tend to worry over a matter—what if this happens or that, or how can I solve this? I worry over problems, real or not—job status, money, my anger that comes at times."

"I take on things I feel I can't handle. I don't know how to say, 'No—that's too much for me right now.' I stress over everything!"

"It's very hard for me to not be able to please everyone. This causes stress in my life."

In the face of all this, where should we turn first for help? Again, the Bible is God's instruction manual for life. It provides the answers and gives us comfort, peace and hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Let's consider some specific biblical principles that can help us cope with stress.

► Does God show us how to reduce stress?

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

When negative experiences and situations are coming at you, and things seem overwhelming, stop, take a deep breath and focus on something lovely and good. Overcoming stress starts with the ability to control our thoughts. We need to focus on the positive, uplifting things of God.

► Can God help when our problems seem overwhelming?

"... Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible'" (Mark 10:27).

Even if *we can't* change something, *God can*. Do we believe that? Have you ever thought about asking God to help you change a situation that is causing you stress?

► How can I find comfort in dealing with the trouble and stress in my life?

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, *who comforts us all in 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” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, emphasis added throughout).

God promises to comfort us in our times of stress. How about trying to be a comfort to someone else who may be going through greater difficulties than you are? Giving comfort or helping someone in another way usually brings satisfaction and joy to the giver. “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20:35, Good News Translation). Part of coping with stress is learning to put it in the right perspective.

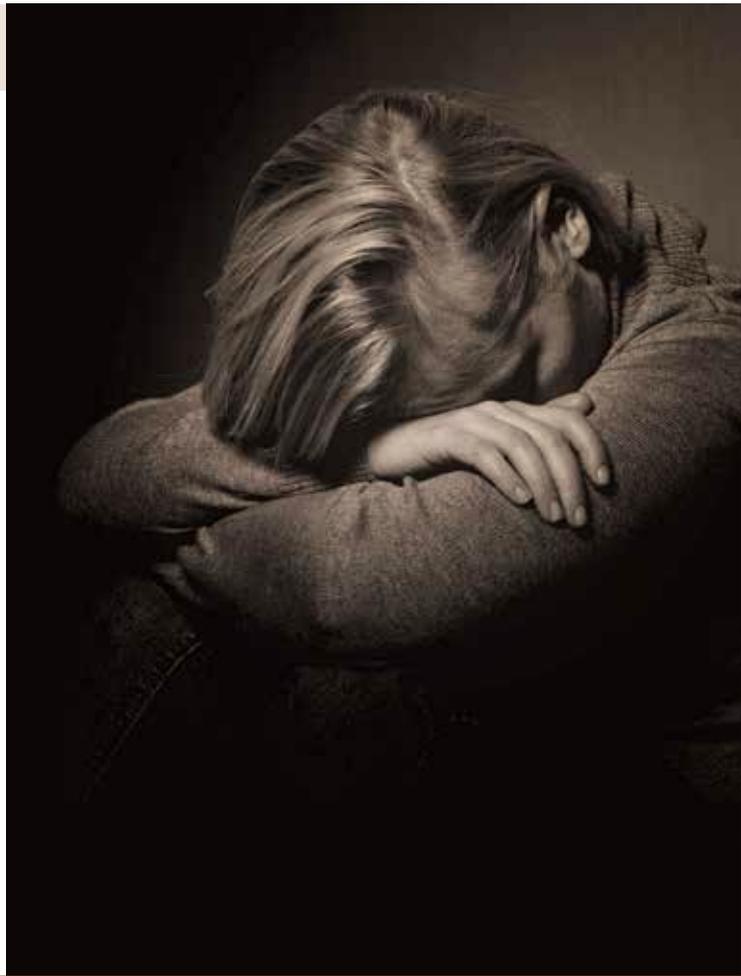
► **Can I expect my life to be more peaceful if I ask God for help?**

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

God’s plan is to bring peace to a troubled world at the return of Jesus Christ. We can have that peace now if we follow His plan for peace. It involves a lifestyle change and a change in our hearts. Peace is part of the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

► **Is there hope even if I feel like I’ve reached my limit in a very serious, stressful situation?**

“Every test that you have experienced is the kind that



Apply These Tips Now

We face many types of stressful situations, but the following list can give you some practical guidelines to apply in your own situation. Some of these are from Helpguide.org.

Look through this list, pick three things you feel could help you this week and try them out. Next week you might want to pick one or two more ideas to try.

- Learn to say “No.”
- Shorten your “to do” list by removing the “shoulds” and keeping the “musts.” Move tasks that aren’t truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.
- Learn what’s really important in your life and set those things as your priority (see Luke 10:38-42).
- Learn to delegate to others when you can. Read the story of the advice Moses received from his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18:13-24.
- Do not say or do things that consistently

irritate someone. Know when to be tactful and respectful about certain subjects (see Ephesians 4:31-32).

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- Be willing to compromise your wishes (not your values) if compromise will help solve the problem.
- Look at the big picture. Put things in perspective. How important will it be in the long run? Will it matter in a year? Is it really worth getting upset about? If not, focus your attention elsewhere.
- Connect with other people, especially positive people. A strong support system will help shield you from the effects of stress.
- Set aside rest and relaxation time in your daily schedule. Don’t allow other things to get in the way. This is your time to recharge your batteries. Meditate on godly things. Listen to

peaceful music. It’s amazing what 10 minutes of that kind of relaxation and peacefulness can do for you.

- Make time every day for leisure activities you enjoy. Take a walk; smell the roses; laugh. Laughter helps your body fight stress in a number of ways (see Proverbs 17:22).
- Exercise regularly and incorporate healthy practices into your lifestyle—eating well, getting adequate sleep and reducing caffeine or sugar intake.
- Practice good time management. Setting your priorities right includes “making the most of your time” (Ephesians 5:16, New American Standard Bible)—especially making absolutely sure you make time for family and, above all, for building a personal relationship with God.
- Live by a budget. So many people struggle with financial problems. Develop a budget and keep to it.

Again, pick out some of these items to try this week and in the coming weeks. You may be pleasantly surprised at how your stress level goes down!

normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out” (1 Corinthians 10:13, GNT).

Consider biblical examples of people facing severe trials. Whatever the trial, when they asked God for help He provided the strength and help for them to bear it. Jesus Christ Himself was “in agony” and “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” as He prayed before His crucifixion (Luke 22:44). God strengthened Him, and God will strengthen us as well when we ask.

► Why do I have to put up with so much stress in my life? Why doesn't God just take it away when I ask Him?

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing

Whatever trial you're going through, it cannot separate you from the love of God. He understands! Jesus Christ knows what it's like to be human. **He loves us.**

happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

We need to believe there is a reason for our trials and that God is in control. God is not far off and unconcerned. He really is working in our lives to transform us from what we are into what He wants us to become. We need to accept trials and tests and understand what they are doing for us.

► What is the ultimate purpose of my stressful trials?

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1-7).

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10; compare Acts 14:22).

We go through stressful trials for a reason: God is

working with us! He wants us to become strong and mature in His character. He was working with Joseph when he was at the bottom of a well and when he was in an Egyptian prison. Joseph had a reason to be stressed out. When Daniel was in the lion's den, he too had a reason to be stressed out. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were facing their fiery trial, they also had a reason to be greatly stressed.

But they kept going and obeying God! They faced their doubts and fears. They didn't collapse in self-pity and cease to trust in God. When you come to realize that there is a divine purpose for your trials, then the stress of dealing with them should diminish.

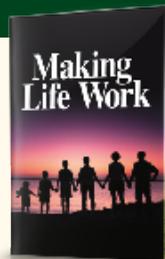
► Can I have confidence that God understands my stress?

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Whatever trial you're going through, it cannot separate you from the love of God. He understands! Jesus Christ knows what it's like to be human. He loves us.

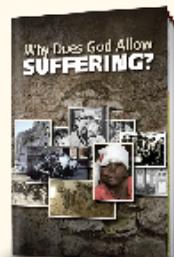
Ask God to help you learn the lessons He has for you. Ask God to help you build His character through your trials. There's nothing wrong with expressing to Him that you're having trouble and that you need His help. He wants you to trust Him and to rely on Him! **BT**



LEARN MORE

Most people don't realize that the Bible is in many ways an instruction manual for life. It's the “how-to” guide for dealing with issues and challenges of life written by the One who created us and gave us life, God Himself. As a result, it shows how we can avoid many problems and much suffering if we will simply follow the life instructions

found in God's Word. To help you avoid many of the problems of life, we've summarized much of the Bible's best advice in a free study guide, *Making Life Work*. We also recommend that you download or request *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* Both of these eye-opening study guides are your free for the asking. Download or request them today!





The Parable of the Talents: Will You Use What God Has Given?

Christ is preparing a people for His coming reign on earth. You have an opportunity to sign on and be a part. But that includes doing your part. What will you choose?

by Darris McNeely

Jesus Christ never intended to establish the Kingdom of God at His first coming. He clearly told His disciples He was giving them the mission of taking the gospel message to the world (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). He compared His followers to servants of a great householder entrusted with fabulous wealth to manage into even greater wealth in his absence.

The Church, made up of Christ's followers, holds the invaluable truth of the coming Kingdom and preaches it to the world, anticipating the day Christ returns. Then will come an accounting. Where will you find yourself on that day?

Three parables of stewardship

On three occasions Jesus used variations of a parable of a master leaving his servants to take care of his business in his absence. The first was when He was approaching Jerusalem before His death. The crowds were thinking He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel immediately. Instead, He spoke a parable of a man going into a far country and leaving his servants a sum of money with the

instruction "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:11-13).

Again, in His prophecy of future events on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told two similar parables to emphasize that the Kingdom was not coming in that moment but that there was work to be done in preparation. Here, in Matthew 24-25, the picture of the servants being left with responsibility is set within the prophecies of the end of the age and highlights the fact that the delay would test the unity and love of the disciples.

In the first parable here, second of the three we've noted, an evil servant would lose sight of his duty and abuse fellow disciples until stopped at the unexpected return of the master (Matthew 24:45-51).

The third version of this parable comes at the end of the same discourse in Matthew 25. In it, Jesus shows the great truth that Christian discipleship carries the responsibility to work in faith and righteousness, anticipating a reward based on what he or she does with God's calling to His truth and the gift of His Holy Spirit and other blessings.

Today, Christ is preparing for His return in glory to

rule the earth. It's what He's been doing since the moment He ascended from the disciples and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem where they would receive power to continue to carry out the work He began in His ministry. When they asked if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel, He responded: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

This was a big job. But the disciples of Jesus have been and still are given what they need to carry out the tasks they've been called to. Will we make use of what God has bestowed on us? Let's look at that last-mentioned parable, told from the Mount of Olives in Matthew 25:14-30, and understand what a disciple is to be doing now, in anticipation of Christ's return.

God bestows talents with an expectation of increase

Christ begins by saying: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey" (verses 14-15).

What do the talents represent? The master here has entrusted his goods, his estate, to the care of servants. The talents are a large sum of money, each equivalent to around \$1.5 million by today's values, a large share of the entire estate. Consider it like 50 years of work for a laborer. Each servant had corresponding ability to handle his sum with an expectation of a respectable return. The sense is that the servants immediately went to work. The master then leaves, expecting those servants to produce an increase or profit with what he's entrusted to them.

Spiritually we might liken this to spiritual gifts given by God to His disciples to be used with the natural talents we have. God entrusts us with His Holy Spirit. He expects us to produce the fruit of the Spirit and to take on the divine nature while growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, serving God and the needs of others. This is done over many years.

"Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money" (verses 17-18).

The first two servants double what is given them. They were diligent, immediately going to work to please their master. They were driven by the size of their job, knowing success or failure depended on them. And they were further motivated by respect for their master coupled with a deep love of who he was and the aim of his wealth—

what he desired to produce.

The third servant, however, took a different approach. He went and buried the money in the ground. This kept the money safe, but it prevented any increase. He showed a certain respect for the share of the master's estate, but not the proper respect in using it as his master intended it to be used. He failed to understand the nature and character of the master, one who desired increase, and likewise failed to carry out his instructions.

A calling to account

"After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

"He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (verses 19-23).

The two who made use of and increased what their master had invested in them understood the benevolent nature of their master. They not only were moved to hold the amount in trust, but they knew the master desired to see productive increase of his estate. The more wealth, the more to share, the better the community. Growing wealth spreads to and benefits others. They share in the productive increase of goods and services. These two servants understood the basic desire of the master to see many others benefit from the fruit of labor.

The mention of joy indicates the divine nature of the whole enterprise. These two servants understood what they were called to do. They worked with a godly fear and love of their master and a commitment to please him.

This is in stark contrast to the third servant. "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours'" (verses 24-25).

This third servant did not understand or appreciate the nature of his master. His excuse was that he feared what he claimed was his master's harsh approach in expecting more than he'd handed out, motivating the man to just hold on to what he had. But this was a huge amount of money. By burying the talent in the ground, he was protecting his share, yet perhaps not even that carefully. And he was not growing it. It did no one any good.

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While he was able to dig it up and return it at the time of accounting, there was nevertheless considerable loss due to missed potential over time.

What he failed to do was to love and appreciate his master and the work his master desired from him of putting to use what he'd been given. His words betray a distant and distorted view of his master. This servant could not enter the "joy" of the lord because there was no joy in his life, no eagerness to please his master.

The master's response should warn us: "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

"So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verses 29-30).

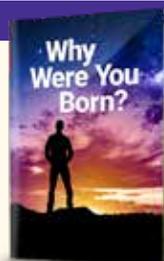
Which example will you follow?

This parable speaks to the divine purpose of God's calling to His followers of this age. God is preparing—preparing a people, and preparing a Kingdom.

Faithful servants will use the gift of the Spirit given by God to develop righteous character. Indeed, they will use the many blessings and abilities God has given them to grow in joyfully serving Him and helping others. Disciples who possess and reflect that divine nature will be the instruments Jesus Christ uses to reign with Him at His return (Revelation 20:4, 6). Those who understand that today's life is a preparation for the age to come will use the talents and abilities given by God and be prepared for the day when His reign on earth begins.

Do you see yourself in this parable? Have you accepted God's calling? Through repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, have you received God's gift of the Holy Spirit? Has God given you the means and talents to serve Him and others?

This parable shows us the reason God calls and sets apart a people to Him. It is to prepare them to reign with Him on His throne in the age to come and help bring God's blessings to all mankind! **BT**



LEARN MORE

God has a purpose and plan for each one of us, but very few understand what that purpose and plan is! And nothing could be more important to your life. Download or request our free study guide *Why Were You Born?* A copy is waiting for you!

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Baptism: Beginning of a New Life

To receive the greatest gifts of God, you must take a specific step—the commitment of water baptism.

by Don Hooser

The greatest gifts anyone can receive come “from above”—from our Creator God (James 1:17). And God offers us two gifts that are by far the most important that any human being can receive in this life. The first gift is the forgiveness of sins. The second is the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

In turn, these two gifts make possible the greatest gift of all, which is eternal, glorified life in the everlasting Kingdom of God (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

Countless people are confused, thinking they have already received God’s forgiveness when they haven’t, and thinking they already have God’s Holy Spirit when they don’t. This article will help you to know one way or the other.

First, it is always *God* who must initiate a relationship with Him. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws [or calls] him” (John 6:44). God calls someone by causing that person to hear the true gospel while at the same time opening up his or her mind to spiritual understanding (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

There is nothing we can possibly do to *earn* eternal life, but God does have *conditions* we must fulfill. One of those conditions is real heartfelt *repentance* over having disobeyed God’s laws. Another condition is *faith* in God—trusting in Him and believing His Word, the Bible. Jesus Christ emphasized these two conditions during His ministry (Mark 1:15).

What shall we do?

But for us to receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, more is required than just repentance and faith. Acts 2 gives us a summary of the apostle Peter’s inspired sermon on the day Jesus’ disciples first received the Holy Spirit. Peter explained that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was necessary to pay the penalty for our sins. It is our sinfulness that was responsible for His suffering. In essence, “you crucified” Him (Acts 2:36).

Notice the reaction of the listeners: “Now when they heard this, *they were cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (verse 37, emphasis added throughout). They

knew God would require them to *do* certain things if they were to be given eternal life.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*’” (verse 38). Peter made it clear that we *must* receive two things to be reconciled to God—forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

Peter said we must first *repent*. But Acts makes no mention of Peter calling for the other condition here, which is *faith*. Why not? Perhaps because the very question “What shall we do?” showed Peter that the people believed in his message and in the Scriptures. They wanted to know what they needed to do next to *act* on that faith!

Therefore, once a person mature enough to make important lifelong decisions has a basic spiritual understanding of and belief in the “gospel”—the *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God and His plan of salvation—God urgently desires to see that person repent and be baptized as soon as is practical. Then he or she can receive the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit.

What is baptism?

The Greek word translated “baptize” is *baptizo*, the common Greek term for *immerse, submerge* or *put into*. So most English Bibles merely anglicize the word to a slightly different spelling rather than translate it. The important point is that, in the Bible, “baptize” always means *immerse*.

Other authors of the time wrote of naval battles in which ships were “baptized”—sunk—in the sea. Therefore, it is nonsensical to say one can baptize (immerse or submerge) by pouring or sprinkling. The Bible itself proves that baptism meant immersion. John the Baptist needed “*much water*” for baptizing (John 3:23). Jesus, when John baptized Him, “came up immediately *from the water*” (Matthew 3:16). When Philip baptized an Ethiopian eunuch, they “*went down into the water*” (Acts 8:38). Afterwards, “*they came up out of the water*” (verse 39).

Why is this important? *Because of what baptism represents*. Being put into and under water pictures a burial,

and rising from the water pictures a resurrection.

Baptism actually pictures *three* deaths, burials and resurrections. First, baptism symbolizes our faith in the fact “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Second, it symbolizes our acknowledgment of the need for our old sinful way of life to be “put to death” and be buried forever (Colossians 3:5; 2:12). And our rising from the water symbolizes our beginning to “walk in newness of life” in a figurative resurrection (Romans 6:3-6). Of course our spiritual character isn’t instantly transformed when we come out of the water. Baptism is a sign of our lifelong dedication to that goal.

Third, baptism symbolizes one’s faith in the hope of the literal resurrection to come—“that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15).

Much more than a ceremony

Symbolism is important, but baptism is *much more* than symbolism. If you were to ask 100 people who are seeking to be baptized, “Have you ever asked God to forgive you?” probably 99 would say yes. Then ask the 99, “Do you think God answered those prayers and forgave you?” Maybe 98 of them will say yes. Then ask them, “So why be baptized if God has already forgiven you, since Acts 2:38 says that the purpose of baptism is to have your sins forgiven?”

Most people are confused. Even when they realize baptism is a biblical requirement, they think of it as a mere ritual of thanksgiving for God’s forgiveness. But Acts 2:38 states that baptism is a *required condition* for forgiveness. Before forgiveness, God requires this *public profession of commitment* to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord (meaning *Master*—to rule over our lives, Luke 6:46).

Many have misinterpreted 1 John 1:9, which says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Most fail to realize that the New Testament epistles were written primarily to Church members—those already baptized. In the epistles, the pronouns “we” and “us” refer to baptized members, while “they” and “them” usually refer to nonmembers.

Therefore, 1 John 1:9 tells us that if a person who has received initial forgiveness through baptism sins after that, he does not need to be baptized again and again. Each subsequent time he sins, he only needs to repent of that sin, confess it to God and ask God’s forgiveness—and God will immediately forgive. This is one of the awesome privileges a person has once he has been baptized!

This explains why baptism is *so important!* God holds each person guilty of *every sin he has ever committed* until those sins are blotted out at baptism (Acts 3:19; 22:16). At the moment the repentant person is immersed in water, all his past sins are forgiven! What a joy it is to stand clean before God!

The next step: Receive God’s Holy Spirit

Once a person has been baptized, he is ready to receive God’s Holy Spirit. The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is the spiritual essence and power that emanates from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. Many are surprised to find that the Bible never mentions a Trinity. Indeed, careful study shows that the traditional formulations of men are quite different from the biblical teaching. (For a definitive scriptural study, read our free study guide *Is God a Trinity?*)

The gift of the Holy Spirit does not come during the baptism or immersion itself. Scripture shows that God gives it immediately afterwards during the *laying on of hands* by one of God’s ministers as he prays for the baptized person to receive the gift of God’s Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6).

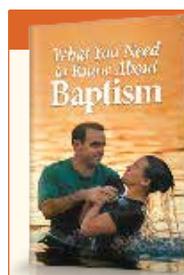
Once you have the Holy Spirit, you have “Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27). You are “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27). You abide in Christ and He abides in you (1 John 3:24). You are among the “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). You have a “new heart” and are becoming a “new man” (Ezekiel 18:31; Ephesians 4:24).

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27). That “body” is the “church of God” (Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2). We cannot “join” the Church of God. God adds us to it when He gives us the gift of His Spirit. We are then *members* of God’s Church (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, *he is not His*”—he doesn’t belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). He is not a true Christian or “son of God” (verse 14). To become a real Christian, you must believe, repent, be baptized, experience the laying on of hands from one of God’s ministers, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Once a mature person has spiritual understanding and faith and has repented of his sins, he should not delay baptism. When God is offering you a gift, why not accept it? Jesus warned against rejecting God’s offer: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). As Ananias said to Saul (whose name was changed to Paul), “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16).

After one receives the Holy Spirit, that is when real spiritual growth begins! **BT**



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God offers us a way to lead a transformed life empowered by His Holy Spirit. Not only does this bring great blessings now, but it also opens the way to eternal life in God’s Family! To learn more, request our free study guide *What You Need to Know About Baptism*.

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Facing the Giants With God's Help

How can we push through when facing overwhelming trials?

by Janet Treadway

Have you ever felt your trials are getting heavier and heavier? Do you ever feel that you are at your absolute limits? I know I have—experiencing the feeling of having exhausted every fiber of our being, losing hope and wanting to quit. Sometimes we get so burdened down with trials that we feel we cannot go another day. Sometimes we even feel we cannot take another step. However, we can. *We must!*

Such trials and challenges can sometimes lead us to think that God is no longer there. But Deuteronomy 31:8 tells us of God: “He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed.” Notice He says He will not leave us!

Years ago I watched a movie that illustrates how much we can endure. Titled *Facing the Giants*, this 2006 movie was about an American football coach who went through hard times and then decided to hand it all over to God.

The part that most affected me was the “death crawl” scene. His team had been losing and concluded nothing would change. Seeing their losing attitude, the coach decided to have the team captain do the death crawl—carrying a fellow player on his back while moving forward on his hands and feet. The person with the heavy load cannot allow his knees to touch the ground. The coach took this exercise one step further and blindfolded the player so he would not see how far he had to go, become overwhelmed and give up.

With each press forward, the load felt heavier and progress seemed harder. The coach, sensing his team captain wanted to quit, got down on his hands and knees and continually yelled out: “Don’t quit!” “You can do this!” “Ten more steps!” “Five more steps!” “Don’t quit!” The coach continued to yell out. When the player could no longer go on, he collapsed with the 160-pound teammate on his back! When he looked up, his coach told him he had just done the death crawl 100 yards! The coach had only asked him to go 50 yards but knew the player could do more!

So, what does football and the death crawl have to do with the trials of today? We can learn crucial lessons with this fighting spirit of “Don’t quit!” God knows you have a lot more endurance in you than you think, just like that coach had belief in his team captain.

Here are three things that will help us fight through trials.

1. Don’t quit! You cannot win if you quit. No matter how hard, no matter how hopeless, we must not quit! We

can make it with God. We must press on! (Philippians 3:12-14).

2. We need encouragement while doing the death crawl. Ask for strength and encouragement when your load is so heavy and you can’t go any further. What got the player through this death crawl was his coach’s encouragement. We all need someone to encourage us along the way. Ask God for encouragement. He is our biggest supporter. He is nearer to us when we hurt and are suffering.

Psalm 46:1-2 says: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” And Psalm 55:22 encourages us with, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (compare 1 Peter 5:7).

3. Be willing to carry on your back your brother or sister who is struggling through trials. In the movie, the death crawl was a dramatic example of someone carrying another on his back. Similarly, we should do all we can to help those who are going through trials of their own! Encourage them. You may even have to carry them for a while by listening, praying for them and just being there. Galatians 6:2 encourages us to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Spoiler alert for the movie! Skip now to the next paragraph if you’d rather not know what happens. As you might guess, the underdog team went on to defeat the Giants because they did not quit when winning seemed hopeless.

Whenever it’s hard to carry on, keep in mind the wonderful assurance of Isaiah 40:28-31: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary, His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

God is bigger than any trials or challenges we face! He is there to help us to be as eagles to fight our own giants and win. With God, all things are possible. We will make it through. We will win! **BT**



America's Economic Transformation

Will It Wreck the U.S. Economy?

We would do well to learn an economic lesson from 3,000 years ago recorded in the pages of the Bible. It reveals the dangerous path America seems determined to follow.

by Mike Kelley

It was about 1050 B.C. and Israel was unhappy. After a couple of centuries of relative freedom under the leaders who represented God, they looked at the other nations around them with envy. Some of these nations were powerful and wealthy. They had kings. They had armies. They had capital cities where power and wealth were centered. The Israelites wanted that too.

Just as it is today, or was until recently, Israel was surrounded by nations that hated them. It seems they were always fighting the Amalekites or the Amorites or the Moabites or, worst of all, the despised Philistines who occupied the coastal area known today as Gaza.

It wasn't that Israel really had to fear these other nations. Whenever the Israelites were ruled by righteous judges, God protected them. He had often fought their battles by evening or more than evening the odds. Samuel was the latest of those judges, and under his leadership God had just given them victory against Philistine attackers (1 Samuel 7:7-13), even restoring several cities the Philistines had earlier captured back to Israelite control.

But that was not enough. The Israelites chafed under

the rule of God through His judges. They wanted to be like the nations around them.

Israel experienced a time of peace and prosperity under the rule of Samuel. But as Samuel aged, his two sons, Joel and Abijah, departed from his righteous path. The elders of Israel came to Samuel with a set of demands, saying: "Look, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5).

God told Samuel to accommodate the people's desires. But in doing so, God zeroed in on the key defining issue: "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, *but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them*" (verse 7, emphasis added throughout). Israel's rejection of God as their king set them on a rocky uneven path where their welfare was dependent on the character and integrity of a human system of government. This decision ultimately led to failure and their downfall.

In verses 9-18 God showed what this would look like. He also told Samuel to "show them the behavior of the

king who will rule over them.” Samuel described what it would be like to live under a king, a king who would set up a “military-industrial complex” conscripting young men into his army, setting up a hierarchical military command structure, and developing a weapons industry to supply that army.

A king would then tax the nation to support that army. A king would practice political cronyism by confiscating choice parcels of private property and redistributing them to his lords, family members and political supporters.

Israel ignored Samuel’s warnings and persisted until God directed him to anoint Saul as Israel’s first king. With this change the Israelites gave up most of their freedom, content to be ruled by a centralized state headed by human monarchs with all the failings of human nature, some righteous and some who acted as despots.

For centuries afterward, Israel lived under this system. After the first three kings—Saul, David and Solomon—Israel split into two nations, Israel and Judah. While there were brief periods when good kings ruled, the history of Israel and Judah was largely one of bloodshed, famine and want, until both Israel and Judah went into captivity.

Parallel with changing sentiments today

Do we see a parallel for America today? After nearly two and a half centuries of economic freedom, where citizens have been free to pursue happiness and fulfillment within a free market capitalist system, a radical realignment is occurring. Incredible as it may seem, tens of millions now desire an ever stronger, ever more centralized government that increasingly controls every segment of their lives.

In the name of equity, that same government—to buy political support and votes—will redistribute income from those who toil and produce to those who feel “entitled” to a guaranteed income, guaranteed free education, guaranteed healthcare, guaranteed food, guaranteed housing, guaranteed *everything*. Contrary to how they’re presented, these programs represent a radical shift in government. The intent goes far beyond caring for people’s basic needs. At stake are the fundamental freedoms enshrined in biblical principles dealing with social welfare and the economy.

Poll after poll shows that a growing number of Americans now believe socialism to be the best human economic system and form of government. A 2020 Gallup poll revealed that 47 percent of Americans would seriously consider voting for a socialist candidate. That sentiment is even more prominent among younger Americans (see “America’s Looming Lurch Into Socialist Progressivism” in our January-February issue).

How did this happen? This is the end product of decades of indoctrination in schools and universities staffed by liberal-thinking educators who teach that free-

market capitalistic societies are fundamentally evil.

Inflation back with a vengeance

Although these trends have been building for years, the Covid-19 epidemic accelerated the pace. The seismic shift in priorities and power that sprang from the 2020 election set in motion economic policies leading to the most serious inflation since the mid-1970s.

Changes so far in 2021 have been little short of breathtaking, with massive amounts (in the *trillions* of dollars) of government stimulus already approved, and nearly \$4 trillion more proposed. All of this is exacerbated by the dictatorial shutdowns of millions of businesses, creating the classic recipe for inflation—too much money chasing too few goods.

Consider that trillions of dollars flowing out of Washington in a gigantic tidal wave have ballooned the U.S. money supply. In confronting an economy dealt a sucker punch by government response to the epidemic, the U.S. Federal Reserve has created these dollars out of thin air. Recent figures from the Federal Reserve’s website [federalreserve.gov](https://www.federalreserve.gov) show currency in circulation increased by \$226.3 billion between June 2019 and June 2020, which equates to *almost 22 percent of all U.S. dollars* being created *in that year alone*.

Under the new administration this policy has continued. Though exact figures on new money creation are hard to verify, the pace has almost certainly accelerated, as the Federal Reserve is mandated to buy new federal government debt in the form of bonds, which injects new money into the economy.

Added to all this new Fed money are the trillions of dollars borrowed by the federal government to fund all the new stimulus spending. A new term, “helicopter money,” has emerged to describe the billions of dollars that seemingly drop from the skies in the form of government stimulus checks. A growing chorus of economists, even some on the liberal side and others who saw this as necessary while so many were kept from working during the lockdowns, are questioning the need for government fiscal stimulus when the economy is already recovering.

Notable among this group is Larry Summers, who served as former President Bill Clinton’s Treasury Secretary. Though he’s long been an advocate of liberal, Keynesian economics, as the new administration piles up proposed stimulus spending plans amounting to almost \$6 trillion, Summers has called for restraint. “The laws of economic arithmetic still apply,” he said recently, pointing out that the large Covid relief plans threaten a return to the economic “stagflation” of the mid-1970s, when the national economy faced the combined threats of economic stagnation and high inflation.

While all this extra money fuels demand, supplies of many products and services are curtailed, due in part



to responses to the epidemic. The result is skyrocketing prices. Gasoline has jumped nearly 30 percent since January alone and is up almost 50 percent over a year ago. Lumber costs have doubled or tripled in many areas, which combined with the scarcity of skilled homebuilding labor has caused housing prices to increase almost 20 percent over the past year—especially in the suburbs where more Americans want to live as they flee increasingly crime-ridden big cities.

The bottom line is that by inflating the amount of currency, creating more dollars out of thin air, along with suppressing the availability of goods and services by government-imposed shutdowns, everything we buy costs more. From a biblical perspective, this amounts to the government *stealing*—stealing the value of its own citizens' money by making it worth less and less.

It has further, through the Federal Reserve, suppressed interest rates to enable itself to borrow massive sums interest-free in the creation of debt instruments for the stimulus packages, thereby destroying citizen's ability to earn interest through savings—thus stealing these potential earnings and possible inflation hedge as well.

What, me work?

All of the “helicopter money” out there has conditioned millions of Americans to believe the federal government will always take care of them. With stimulus checks and doubling of unemployment benefits, many Americans see no point in working at a job. The April 2021 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) jobs report was expected to show more than a million Americans returning to work. Instead, government economists were horrified to learn that only a quarter of that number, or 266,000, had resumed working.

Let's be clear: This was not due to lack of job openings. The National Federation of Independent Business recently reported that a record 42 percent of business owners posted job openings as of early Spring 2021. The BLS recorded 7.4 million job openings as of early March. Even government economists had to admit the problem was the *disincentive to work* caused by excessive unemployment payments.

This has dealt a major blow to millions of small businesses that struggled to stay afloat during the epidemic. The problem is so bad that more than 20 states have dropped out of the federal unemployment stimulus program well before its September expiration date, to remove the work disincentive.

From a biblical perspective, this also is a form of stealing. The government takes money from wealth producers through taxation and gives it to those who produce nothing. And while the Bible teaches us to care for the poor and lays out specific instructions for fair and equitable ways to do so, such short-sighted government programs make it more appealing for people to stay at home and

not work than to actually get a job and produce anything of value! Sadly, government debt has grown so enormous that we are stealing from future generations, leaving it to our children and children's children to pay back the debt from such profligate spending.

Not to worry, just tax the wealthy and big corporations

The march toward income redistribution is growing as the current administration tries to ram legislation through Congress to raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy. It has long been part of the socialist dream for government to fund programs such as free daycare, free community college, and college loan forgiveness on the backs of corporations and the wealthy.

But will huge corporations and wealthy individuals really pay more? A basic economic fact is that companies pass along most tax increases to consumers in the form of higher prices, and the vast majority of wealthy individuals hire tax and investment advisors who set up their wealth to avoid taxes. So all this “free” stuff ends up coming at a great cost to all the citizens, who are again being stolen from.

Further, most Americans have heard about secret bank accounts in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands, among the many techniques used to hide vast sums of wealth. As a result, many economists fear that as these sources of additional tax revenue prove inadequate to fund redistribution schemes, taxes will inevitably be raised on less-wealthy Americans.

Looking for safe havens

All the inflation news has prompted many to turn to gold and silver as inflation hedges and, more recently, to cryptocurrencies. The economic press and media fed the growing mania with speculation that gold prices might again reach nearly \$2,000 per ounce as they had in 2011. Millions of investors, especially newer, younger investors using new trading websites such as Robinhood.com, threw vast sums of money into cryptos with names like Bitcoin, Coinbase, and Dogecoin. Banks announced they would begin accepting crypto deposits; brokerage houses hired crypto investing specialists.

Other people are turning to more traditional assets such as real estate, contributing to the massive rise in demand that is seeing houses in many markets sell within 24 hours at prices well above asking price. The last thing many want to do is leave money in bank accounts paying less than 1 percent interest.

We have come to the point where most, it seems, have forgotten *there is no such thing as a free lunch*. A great many have come to rely on *wealth that doesn't really exist*. In a perfect storm of employee layoffs, business shutdowns and “free” government money, the unemployed produced nothing. They added nothing to the national

wealth. The money to cover the billions in stimulus checks is borrowed. It adds to the national debt. In theory, it has to be repaid, although few Americans believe this will ever happen.

What about the poor?

There is no doubt that government response to the Covid epidemic has inflicted unimagined hardship on millions since the spring of 2020. It's not hard to see why

Most, it seems, have forgotten that **there is no such thing as a free lunch**. A great many have come to rely on **wealth that doesn't really exist**.

growing numbers of Americans are turning to socialism with its promises as a possible improvement. But is it really? Human government has caused the problem. So why would more of it make things better?

One need only look at the many examples of centrally controlled Marxist economies over the past century to see their dismal failure. The Soviet Union, Communist China, North Vietnam, North Korea and more recently Venezuela—all have failed miserably.

Not long ago, Venezuela was one of the three most prosperous nations in South America, with an expanding economy and high living standards for its citizens. Yet, under Marxist dictators Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro, hunger has become so widespread that 75 percent of the population has lost 15 percent or more of their body weight! Wracked with hyperinflation of as much as 1.7 million percent per year, Venezuela's economy has all but completely broken down.

China, the world's most populous nation with nearly 1.4 billion inhabitants, wallowed in third-world stagnation for decades after Mao Zedong consolidated power under his communist regime in 1949. Starting in 1978, however, the Chinese government did start permitting partial free-market practices, which have brought significant economic growth and improved living conditions for many. However, this is a fascistic arrangement with business serving state interests, repression and tyranny persisting. The prosperity of the Chinese people would be far greater in a truly free society with a genuinely free market. And the same is true of people everywhere.

The all-important biblical perspective

As Christians, we must look at the world from a biblical perspective and share our understanding and care. Jesus Christ taught that people must help the poor. The biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John relate many examples of His compassion on the poor and downtrodden, many of whom suffered under harsh Roman rule.

He fed them, healed them and comforted them. But

He also told His disciples, "The poor you have with you always" (John 12:8). Nowhere in Christ's teaching do we see Him calling for a revolution, an overthrow of the Roman state to usher in a new economic order. Instead, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Following His death and resurrection, His disciples spread the good news of the Kingdom of God throughout the known world. That message foretold a coming world order of peace and prosperity under Jesus Christ at His return.

Some will claim the early Church was socialist, citing Acts 2:44-45: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their pos-

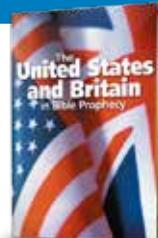
sessions and divided them among all, as anyone had need." But when we examine this more closely, we see this was the case only in the context of the time and circumstances. The Church began on the Day of Pentecost, when many were visiting Jerusalem temporarily. Those first Christians banded together there in voluntary sharing for mutual protection and sustainment, but only for a short time.

Nowhere does God's Word support laziness and sloth. On the contrary, the apostle Paul made it clear to the church at Thessalonica, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

But the key issue has not changed. As Israel rejected God's rule more than 1,000 years before Christ, so America has rejected God's direction in our society today. This, too, harks back to a warning God gave Israel through the first judge in the Promised Land, Joshua.

In the dramatic three chapters of Deuteronomy 28, 29 and 30, God spelled out for the ancient Israelites both the blessings for obedience to His law as well as the curses that would befall them for disobedience. It is obvious that America, like ancient Israel, is making all the wrong choices.

For the moment American life seems to perhaps be returning to normal, but economic curses are building. The anxiety millions feel from the effects of the epidemic responses, from lost jobs, rampant inflation and wrong direction from Washington are all too real. In times like this, do you know where to turn? The first step is to wake up and understand the real situation facing America in these times—and recognize our need for God's intervention! **BT**



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What lies ahead for the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and the other English-speaking nations? Does Bible prophecy describe what the future holds for them? Download or request your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more!

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Many Millennials “don’t know, care, or believe” God exists

The 2021 American Worldview Inventory survey from Arizona Christian University’s Cultural Research Center, directed by sociologist George Barna, has found that while 57 percent of Millennials (born between 1984 and 2002) identify as Christian, 43 percent “don’t know, care, or believe that God exists.” For older generations, the latter grouping is smaller but still sizeable—31 percent of Gen X (born 1965–1983), 28 percent of Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) and 27 percent of the Builder or Silent Generation (born 1927–1945).

As reported at Breitbart News, “Barna said the shift in America’s spiritual landscape started almost 60 years ago with progressive changes among Boomers, but that Millennials have aggressively cut ties with core biblical views and lifestyle values. According to the survey, Millennials are ‘far more likely’ than other generations to:

- Define success in life as happiness, personal freedom, or productivity without oppression

- Consider an abortion performed to reduce personal economic or emotional discomfort to be

morally acceptable

- Consider premarital sex with someone expected to be their future spouse to be morally acceptable

- Deem reincarnation a real possibility

- Be liberal regarding fiscal and social policies

- Champion liberal theology

- Be among the ‘Don’ts’—people who either do not know if God exists, do not believe that He exists, or do not care if He exists

“Barna included in his summary of the worldview of Millennials, as presented in his research, their tendency to perceive expansion of government will facilitate a better life and that public programs and policies should have flexible boundaries. In addition, the sociologist noted the survey suggests younger Americans are seeking ‘fewer formal marriages’ and ‘the reduced appeal of raising children’” (Susan Berry, May 20, 2021).

Continuing, “Barna said the survey results warn of a significant challenge for the future of Christian faith in America. ‘If Christian churches, pastors, schools, and individuals believe that a

biblical Christian faith is important—not just for themselves but also for our nation and the world beyond it—time is running out to aggressively and strategically act on that belief,’ he cautioned, ‘before those who so vehemently disagree succeed in destroying the freedom and opportunity to preserve the ways of God.’”

Even among those who call themselves Christian, progressivism and Marxism are growing, being repackaged as Christian concepts, explains author Lucas Miles in his new bestselling book *The Christian Left: How Liberal Thought Has Hijacked the Church*. Miles notes that the shift is made easier through increasing biblical illiteracy (Leah Klett, “Lefist Ideology Permeating Church ‘Extremely Dangerous’ to Body of Christ,” *The Christian Post*, May 27, 2021). Indeed, even more traditionalist Christians are sadly lacking in biblical understanding.

Society is drifting farther and farther from God, just as the Bible has foretold. Hold fast to God and His true teachings, making sure that you are not swept away with the spirit of the times.

Antisemitism again on the rise

The recently reignited Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East has set off a new wave of antisemitic sweeping the Western world.

Conservative commentator Mark Levin decried U.S. government leaders failing to speak out against what’s happening. He mentioned seeing “on TV individuals with Antifa-like clothing with the Palestinian flag chasing down Jews in cities throughout this country, in cars, attacking Jews, organized like Black Lives Matter and Antifa, beating Jews, graffiti on synagogues including swastikas and so forth . . . The FBI says 60 percent of all anti-religious hate crimes is against Jews, [yet] the Jews are a tiny percentage of the population . . . This is frightening. And it’s happening all over the world, but to be happening in the United States of America is absolutely appalling” (Fox News, May 25, 2021).

British columnist Melanie Phillips writes of the problem growing in the United Kingdom: “A convoy of cars flying the Palestinian flag drove through one Jewish area of north London after another,” with curses and calls to rape Jewish daughters being screamed through megaphones for hours. This came a day after “a mass Israel

hate-fest in London over the war in Gaza” (“Britain Slides Into an Antisemitic Sewer,” May 18).

She comments that “even now . . . few in public life can bring themselves to acknowledge the symbiotic connection between hatred of Israel and hatred of the Jews—and that the latter creates the former, and not the other way round . . . There’s still an absolute refusal in many quarters to acknowledge that the hysteria against Israel can only be explained—in its demonic irrationality and determination to libel the Israelis as child-killers, while excusing those who really are murdering and procuring the deaths of children and other innocents—as a profoundly unhinged obsession with demonising the Jewish people.

“To repeat: there is no other conflict, issue, people or country in the world which has ever been subjected to such a campaign of systematic, obsessional and paranoid falsehoods and inversion of historical, legal and demonstrably factual reality. This is a unique pathology, directed uniquely at both the Jewish people and the Jewish state because it is the same unique disorder with the same unique characteristics. And it has one name. Antisemitism.”

The worst of it today is seen among the Palestinian Arabs, as she goes on to illustrate, quoting from Palestinian Media Watch: “. . . Children recite poems on official PA TV stating that ‘our enemy, Zion, is Satan with a tail,’ and that Jews were ‘condemned to humiliation and hardship’ and are ‘the most evil among creations, barbaric monkeys, wretched pigs.’ PA antisemitism reaches its pinnacle by presenting Jews’ existence as a fundamental threat to all humanity . . . At times the PA has explicitly stated its horrific conclusion: The Jewish threat to humanity will be stopped only by exterminating all Jews . . . Since killing any and all Jews is self-defence, every act of Palestinian murder [of Jews] is packaged as a heroic act with Allah’s stamp of approval . . . This is what British and American so-called ‘progressives’—including, appallingly and tragically, many ‘progressive’ Jews—are actually supporting when they endorse the Palestinian cause. But . . . this horrific collusion has been going on for decades.”

For those who know the Scriptures, the real enemy behind all this should come as no surprise. Satan is the one who wants to destroy the Jewish people and all Israel. But though he will yet do great damage toward this end, his aims will ultimately be thwarted by the return of Jesus Christ to rule all nations. May that day come swiftly!

Israel again blamed for violence with Palestinians

As usual, the state of Israel was the object of world condemnation in the recent flare-up of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Hamas operatives in Gaza fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel and Israeli forces struck back. Many argued that Palestinians were retaliating against Israeli aggression, but the whole thing “began when Hamas, a designated terrorist organization that rules Gaza, encouraged young people



An Israeli bus and car destroyed by Hamas missiles fired at Israeli civilians from Gaza.

to stockpile rocks, stones and chunks of concrete in the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem,” as noted by All Israel News editor Joel Rosenberg (Art Moore, “Palestinians Provoked Conflict with Attacks on Jewish Worshipers,” WND, May 11, 2021).

“Israel forces then had to move in to the Temple Mount to protect the worshippers . . . ‘And, of course, [Rosenberg] said, ‘this was designed to pull Israeli forces in and then create a ‘moment,’ where . . . the radical Islamic world could begin to say Israel is . . . desecrating our holy site.’ . . . ‘The media act as though, suddenly, one day Israel decided to be mean to Palestinians and started bombing Gaza,’ he said. Rosenberg also noted that Hamas is upset that the Palestinian [Fatah] leadership in the West Bank called off an election, allegedly because they thought Hamas would win.”

In response to Hamas rocket attacks, writes Jeff Jacoby of *The Boston Globe* in his newsletter *Arguable*, “Israel bombed hundreds of Hamas positions in Gaza, many of them located in homes, buildings, and tunnels. Hamas deliberately locates arms

caches, military infrastructure, and command posts in civilian settings, in order to force Israel into an excruciating dilemma: If it attacks Hamas positions, Palestinian civilians may be harmed, but if it refrains from attacking such sites, Hamas will continue firing at Israeli communities.

“As a matter of longstanding policy, Israel goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid harming civilians, even telephoning residents in advance of a strike to give them time to evacuate. But civilian casualties are an inevitable and tragic result in all wars . . . According to Hamas, 232 residents of Gaza were killed in the recent fighting (some by Hamas rockets that misfired). Israel says that at least 160 of them were targeted terrorists, many of whom it has identified by name. If so, that means its hundreds of bombing runs in the densely populated territory were so meticulously targeted that they caused the death of fewer than 70 civilians, an astonishing achievement” (“My Three Trips to Gaza,” May 24).

Meanwhile, as British columnist Melanie Phillips notes, the media generally continue to condemn Israel above Hamas, even accusing the Israelis of trying to hide what was going on or even targeting the media when Israel warned media personnel to evacuate the “media building” in Gaza City before bombing it. In fact it “actually housed . . . a Hamas research and development unit, Hamas military intelligence and offices of the Palestinian Islamic jihad” (“A Murderous Co-operation,” May 16).

Phillips points out: “The real outrage is that these media outlets were sharing that building with a Hamas intelligence nerve center—an outfit which doesn’t seem to have struck them as, you know, a *rather big story* to investigate. Of course not. For this is part of a much larger issue . . . The only journalists allowed to be in Gaza are those who deliver the story Hamas wants to tell the world . . . Most reporting from Gaza is delivered by local Palestinian ‘stringers’ or fixers. They may boast respectable media accreditation like AP. But they are either members of Hamas them-

selves or are all too aware that if they don’t deliver what Hamas wants them to deliver, they’re dead.”

Pray for the day when this region and the whole world can at last know peace!

Government bought aborted baby parts

The Federalist published a disturbing story titled “Federal Government Caught Buying ‘Fresh’ Flesh of Aborted Babies Who Could Have Survived as Preemies” (Edie Heipel, April 15, 2021).

Earlier in April, “legal accountability group Judicial Watch dropped a bombshell: a nearly 600-page report proving the U.S. government has been buying and trafficking ‘fresh’ aborted baby body parts. These body parts, purchased by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ‘humanize’ mice and test biologic drugs in scientific experiments, came from babies up to 24-weeks-old gestation, just weeks from being born . . .

“Recent emails uncovered by Judicial Watch between FDA employees and the California-based Advanced Bioscience Resources (ABR) prove the agency spent tens of thousands of dollars buying aborted babies for unethical scientific experiments between 2012 and 2018. In 2018, the Trump administration terminated the contract, halting government fetal tissue research due to concerns the contracts were unlawful.”

The rest of the article is gruesome and difficult to read. How far the nation has fallen from the moral sensibilities of former times! There will surely be a reckoning for such atrocity and its perpetuation.

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/



Whom Do You Belong To?

Four words on a gravestone raise a question with far-reaching and eternal consequences—to whom does your life belong?

by Robin Webber

You can learn a lot when visiting a cemetery. One thing you take in is how quiet the grounds are—after all, the residents are not saying much. There’s also the realization that death does not pick and choose those who join its ranks. It simply swallows up all humanity.

Many of those buried under the manicured lawns were perhaps acquainted with portions of Ben Franklin’s quip that “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” Perhaps they had nonetheless pushed that out of mind, some even with no sense of accountability. Yet still their lives all ended—and rarely in a time of their choosing.

Recently I learned more about life in paying respects at my parents’ resting spot. On leaving, I stumbled on an amazing tombstone. Like all markers it had a name and dates of birth and death divided by a dash, but it was the epitaph below that grabbed my attention. It proclaimed all I needed to know about the quietness of the dash above. It read “*The Property of God.*”

That was it—and it was everything. Four simple words defined this individual’s focus in life. And they expressed a great truth we all need to understand about God’s calling. Here before me was a gift bequeathed to me in the moment, a powerful reminder of what we become in responding to Jesus Christ’s welcoming invitation of “*Follow Me.*”

What does “The Property of God” mean?

The word “*property*,” which first caught my attention here, demands careful unpacking. The clear sense was that of ownership—*being owned by God and belonging to Him as a possession*. Many would be hesitant to use such terminology or to accept it. Property? Really? In our current society, why would someone desire to tell all who pass by that he or she was owned?

Humanly it might seem repugnant. On the surface it seems to have echoes of human bondage. But what did it mean to the deceased individual? And what may we, the living, derive from Scripture regarding the life and times of Jesus and His early followers?

Rome ruled the Western world in the first century A.D. Historians estimate that the Italian peninsula’s population was 40 to 50 percent slaves, and in the remainder of the empire perhaps 10 percent were slaves. Slavery was part and parcel of the times.

Slaves were stationed among all levels of society. Whether secretaries in the imperial household, teachers, artists, field hands, miners or galley rowers, they all had one thing in common—they *belonged to someone else*. They were *property* to carry out someone else’s bidding and not their own.

This was the world of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, written in the Greek language. They refer often to slaves. But subsequent Bible translations have softened the reality of the times and the fullness of the intent by using more neutral-sounding English words such as “servant,” “bondservant,” “bondman” and “bondmaid.”

Consider how *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* breaks down the original Greek word translated into these terms: “*doulos* . . . from *deo*, ‘to bind;’ ‘a slave;’ originally the lowest term in the scale of servitude, came also to mean ‘one who gives himself up to the will of another’” (1985, p. 73).

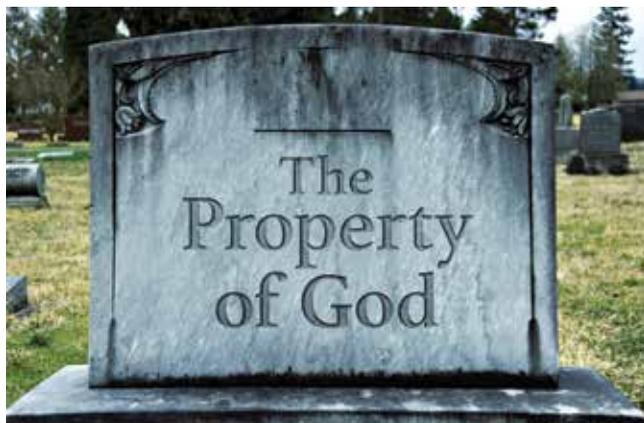
This is the sense of being the property of another—even the property of God. Of course God sees us as *more* than property, for we belong to Him as His very own children. But that does not change the fact that we are still His property, He being our Owner and Master—albeit a Master who loves us completely.

Jesus did the unthinkable

What can we learn from the greatest Teacher of all time regarding not only who He was and what He said, but what He practiced throughout His human existence? Knowing Him and *becoming like Him* as we accept His invitation of “*Follow Me*” are two different levels of experience, and we must understand both.

Growing up, Jesus would have been familiar with Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.” He fully understood the reality of God as Creator so that all that exists, whether animate or inanimate, belongs to Him. Simply put: *It is all God’s property.*

But there is more to glean. In Jesus’ uncreated preexistence as God, the Word who was God with the Father, all things were created through Him (John 1:1-3, 14). “For by Him [Jesus] all things were created that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). As God the Creator



Four simple words defined this individual's focus in life. And they expressed a great truth we all need to understand about God's calling.

along with the Father, Jesus owned everything along with the Father. Heaven and earth were Their shared property!

And then the divine Word performed the humanly unthinkable—He became one of us. For “though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; *he took the humble position of a slave* and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, New Living Translation, emphasis added throughout).

This passage encapsulates where He came from, the state in which He arrived, the way in which He existed as the Son of Man—taking on the role of a humble, obedient slave—and how He departed the human experience. He became all of us and displayed firsthand how we can become more than we could ever be on our own—in submitting our life as the property of God.

Christ's life was purposeful and not accidental. He lived every moment by divine design and obedience. His purpose and calling to be our Savior owned Him and filled Him up. As the Son of Man in this human existence, He belonged to God the Father and in His own words proclaimed, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me” (John 4:34). Even in the most challenging moments of His life, with death just around the corner, He remained steadfastly obedient when He told our Heavenly Father, “I want your will to be done, not mine” (Mark 14:36, NLT).

His purpose was eternal in scope. He came and died “that they [you and I] may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). His belonging to His and our Heavenly Father and belonging to Their joint purpose broke our bondage to Satan, our bondage to sin and our bondage to self-aggrandizement that lurks within us. Peter plainly tells us that “you were not redeemed

[ransomed beyond our capabilities to do so] with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

“You were bought at a price”

Building on this purchase from death to life, the apostle Paul sums it up in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, reminding all who would heed the invitation of “Follow Me”: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [which] is in you . . . *and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*”—that is, which belong to God.

All the early purveyors of the gospel came to understand and accept this God-given role when they accepted the invitation of “Follow Me.” Scriptures such as Romans 1:1, 2 Peter

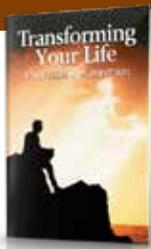
1:1 and James 1:1 plainly show that Paul, Peter and James (Jesus' half-brother) *viewed themselves as Christ's slaves* (*doulos* in Greek, meaning a slave belonging to someone else and not just a servant, as often assumed). This is how they introduced themselves as they introduced their messages. And all of us are to likewise be slaves to God and His righteousness for our ultimate good (Romans 6:16-23).

As we understand and hopefully embrace what it means to be “The Property of God,” we need to ask ourselves a simple question: *What part of our lives have we not yet given over to God?*

Jesus Christ presents us this non-flexible equation: “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). Again, the call of “Follow Me” is more than simply who you know or answering the question of “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). It is *becoming like* the Master Teacher—the same One who proclaimed in words and by example: “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30).

Jesus “belonged” to His Father in every way and placed His life in His care to the very end when He prayed, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). As you walk away from reading these words, think on this question: How will your living legacy read? Will it reflect that you are “The Property of God”? **BT**

LEARN MORE



What does it mean to truly accept Jesus Christ's invitation of “Follow Me” and to strive to become like Him? What does that look like in real life? Download or request our free study guide *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* to learn more!

BTmagazine.org/booklets



“Abortion’s Other Victims”

I also had an abortion; I have five children and another one was aborted (or else I would have six children). Going to an online support group didn’t help because the person there didn’t really understand my pain, I guess. I love the United Church of God, to which I have returned after having gotten away from it. I want to get the help I need to be strong from my Church. Thank you so much.

From the Internet

Even at 85 years old, I still hurt over an abortion many years ago. The pain is real. I’m praying that God will forgive me.

From the Internet

Author’s response: The pain is real. I do understand. It is a grief and a loss and longing that is hard to describe, and it is even harder to carry. That is why our Savior has carried our griefs and our sorrows. We weren’t built to be able to do so. I have found great encouragement in reading through the example of David and his sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. David did unspeakable things and though he somehow had sort of papered over it, God could not let that go on. God’s desire was to have a real unobstructed relationship with David.

And so He sent Nathan to confront King David with that sin. When Nathan came and said “You are the man!” David immediately took responsibility: “I have sinned against the LORD.” David repented and then was able to come afresh to worship God (2 Samuel 12:20). That example is so personally comforting. David is not left to wallow in his sin, but God makes sure he is confronted with it—not to condemn but for the purpose of repentance. David acknowledges his sin and repents, and immediately God gives Nathan these words: “The LORD has taken away your sin.” Our sin brings sorrow, but godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation. I am praying for you!

“Heartbeats Never Lie”

I am cheering right now! Thank you, thank you! So much truth and wisdom in your article!! These words are so much needed in our world (and church) today!

From the Internet

“When Does Life Begin?”

I must say that this was one of the best-presented arguments against abortion I have ever read. It was clear, concise, faith-based and factual.

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I really enjoy Beyond Today magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

—K.T., Facebook fan



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I enjoyed it, and it has re-reinforced my own personal beliefs. Thank you for writing it, and I hope it will inspire others to fight for life. God bless.

From the Internet

Letters about our free literature and TV program

I would like to thank all of those who work on producing such quality literature at your organization! I was utterly impressed with the free booklets I received in the mail. Not only because of their quality but also how informative and enlightening they were! I appreciate the added verses for a more in-depth study while reading the content. In my search for honest and reliable information, I have been led astray throughout the years by the endless, empty preaching of a hollow gospel taught and accepted by so many today. I regularly use your literature and videos for my study. It has been profoundly impactful on my level of understanding and spiritual growth. Thank you. God bless.

Reader in Canada

I started getting your *Beyond Today* magazines and have learned so much from them. It’s hard because my family doesn’t believe in God, nor do most of my friends. I have really depended on your literature as well as your sermons online to further my knowledge of God’s Word and His coming Kingdom here on earth. I pray for your entire organization so you can continue to produce such great literature, articles and sermons to help make our faith even stronger. Thank you so much for reaching out to many people like me. May God bless all of you always.

From the Internet

How to find a congregation near you

I have just found your site after receiving several copies of *Beyond Today*. I have been looking to leave my current church, and I do believe the United Church of God (publisher of *Beyond Today*) might be a good fit. I am homebound, so accessing webcasts is very important for me. Thank you.

From the Internet

My husband and I are very interested in joining your church, but we need to know if there is one near where we live in Maine. A lot of prayer has gone into our decision. We really feel that God is prompting us to attend your church, as ours does not recognize the need to observe the Sabbath or the feasts, and it has now been revealed to us that this is God’s will for our life! I await your reply. May God richly bless you!

From the Internet

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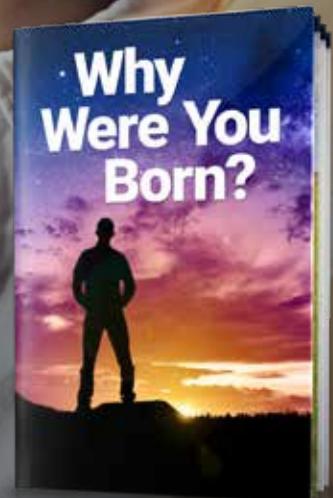
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