

Antidotes To Fear And Depression

God's Revelation Provides Hope

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Beyond doubt, the events of September 11th and what has occurred since then have made a profound impact on this nation. I am not talking just about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the plane going down in Pennsylvania. There are also things like the anthrax scares, and the warnings we have had from the government that something might be coming this week, because we have gotten this certain alert, or what have you. That has made a profound impact on this nation. Things have changed here.

We hear on the news, *ad infinitum*, it seems, about heightened security at every public place—at sporting events, at train stations, at bus stations, and especially at airports. That seems to be the focal point of all these security measures that are being taken. The nation itself is at war—another undeclared war that we are fighting in a far off place. And even though the Taliban seems to be in full retreat, we have the specter of Vietnam hanging over us because we do not trust our government to give us the truth about these things. There is a certain amount of fear and uncertainty about that.

But on the other hand, patriotism seems to be at an all time high. People out there on the streets are showing their colors, flying their flags. They have their red, white, and blue bumper stickers on. They say, "God bless America." It is just everywhere. And even though I said that we do not trust our government to give us the truth, trust in the government is at an all time high. We are allowing them to take our liberties so that we will be secure. And we trust the Federal government, which has a track record that is just abysmal at providing things cheaply but well done.

I am thinking specifically about the airport security. They are going to federalize all those workers over the next year. This is the sort of thing that drives up our taxes, takes away our freedoms, and basically turns us into more of a police state—because that is basically what those security people will be.

We put the Reserves in our airports. It used to be that we could go outside the country (let us say to France, or to South Africa—places where I have been), and we see machine-gun-toting soldiers in the airports; and we say, "Man, I'm glad that we in America don't have to worry like this." It was kind of an oddity—one of those things that we went outside of America to see. You know, we take pictures of these guys in the airports holding their AK-47s or M-16s or whatever it happens to be. But now, in America the same has happened.

Perhaps the most profound change, though, has been in our heads—psychological. The American people have been changed deeply by the terrorists' attacks and by these things that have happened since then. Not just because they have happened, but because they have happened *here*. They have happened on our own home soil. We are not "safe" anymore, within the bounds of the Atlantic and the Pacific—guarded by the great white north (Canada) and by our friends to the south (Mexico).

Now we tremble because we are at risk. To many people, that is a very fearful thing. They did a poll, and 1 in 5 people said that they knew someone there at the World Trade Center, or they had connections in some way to someone at the World Trade Center—whether it was because they worked for the same company, or something along that line. And so people feel like this has struck them almost personally, right in their own backyard.

So Americans are no longer carefree and stubbornly ignorant of what is happening beyond their borders. It used to be that we were so isolated to what was going on "out there." Now we watch the news assiduously, to try to find out what is going on. Not only here at home, or in our own cities, but we look and see what is happening around the world—because now the world has, in a way, fallen on us. We have been rudely introduced to the realities of the world and the way other people have to live, beyond the shores of America.

Most of all, American's now know fear. They know insecurity. And this is shocking, disturbing, and (to many people) depressing. They understand and even feel a kind of kinship with people like the Israelis who live 'under the gun' all of the time. Or the Kosovars, who have been in an ethnic fight for

generations; and the Kurds, who are under the thumb of both the Turks and the Iraqis. We feel like we have been besieged, in a way.

I would like to read some news items that I have culled off the Internet, to give you some idea of what people out there are thinking, what writers are writing about. This comes from *The Washington Post*, from September 25, 2001. It is called "Is Mental Health Care Prepared?" by Melody Simmons. She writes:

The extent of the wounds to the nation's psyche was suggested in a poll released last week by the Peer Research Center that found 71% of Americans report having experienced depression since the September 11th attacks. Nearly half have had difficulty concentrating, and one in three [33%] have had trouble sleeping.

This next one is from *Entertainment News Daily*. It is called "Relief From Depression And Anxiety from September 11 May Take Time" by a man named Mitch Mitchell, from the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* on October 17th. He writes:

"The September 11th terrorists' attacks were such a national tragedy it was inevitable that people would be affected mentally," counselors and physicians say. "Even before the attacks, some individuals were challenged by a faltering economy and the stress that puts on families and relationships. Now a fear of bio-terrorists exists," experts point out.

"I am hearing from people who are having a lot of unusual dreams, having to do with anxiety about the terrorists' attacks," said Robin Hall, a Colleyville doctor [This is in Texas.] "A lot of people are telling me that they are handling it okay in front of their children and their coworkers; but, in private, they are afraid. The most anxiety is over the uncertainty of the situation. It's not fear that they, or a family member, will be killed; but it's a fear of the unknown."

A little bit later, in the same article, Mitchell writes:

"But the fear spawned by bio-terrorism may be disproportionately large in relationship to the threat it represents," physicians say. Perhaps that is because biological and chemical weapons are an unseen threat; and people see the conditions they cause as untreatable, leaving many with a doomsday outlook.

"Some people think that you walk into a subway, like people did in Japan, and you never come out," said Dan Handel, medical director of Pain Management and Palliative Care for Harris Methodist in Fort Worth.

The next one is from a speech by Hillary Rodham Clinton (October 1, 2001). She was at a breakfast that was given in New York City, and she was the keynote speaker. I just want to pull out one sentence. She said, "New York City and New York State have estimated that at least 1.5 million people are at risk for needing mental health services in the aftermath of the disaster." That is just in New York, and mostly in the city.

A poll by the Internet site About.com is still going on. (I do not know just exactly when it was begun, but these are its current results.) The question, "Has your anxiety disorder become worse since September 11th?" So they are talking about people who already have certain anxieties. "77% said, 'Yes, it's worse.' Only 16% said, 'It's about the same.'" So three-fourths of the people who answered that poll said that their depression, anxiety, fears, or whatever have increased since September 11th.

Now I would like to read a few personal accounts, or experiences, that people have had since September 11th. I got this off a website that deals with panic and anxiety disorders. So these people are already anxious about what is going on; and now, this is their response to the September 11th attacks.

This one unnamed person said,

I've been having problems sleeping. I don't seem to be that worried during my waking hours; but at night, it is a different story. I have nightmares, and night sweats; and I wake up crying a lot. A friend

introduced me to some relaxing techniques, and they have helped a bunch.

From a woman named Lisa:

I'm afraid that everyone around me is going to hurt me. I'm afraid to be alone, especially at night; and mostly, afraid in my own home. Somehow, being out with others feels better. I check all my locks so often. Work was a godsend this week—just to think of something else for a bit. My mind is so tired. I am so drained. This morning, I was finally able to cry a little. I have found myself to be basically numb, petrified by fear. I was doing really well with my anxiety [meaning before the September 11th attacks], but this has been a real setback for me. I don't feel bad about my anxiety being so overwhelming right now, because even people who don't have an anxiety disorder are feeling very similar things. I do hate the fear though. I want the choice to wake up and decide if the day will be a good one or not.

Then, a little bit later, she says:

I keep telling myself it is okay to be anxious and sad. What I am also trying to tell myself is the logical side of this—that we are doing everything we can to make sure it does not happen again, and that (most likely) right now others will not try the same thing. Yet, I still feel very alone and scared.

This is from a man named Sean:

Usually I fret over things, but now I find myself numb. I'm scared about the idea of war. I'm frightened beyond belief of how this will affect my family. I just have to keep going though. I push through each day, repressing my feelings; because, if I let my feelings out, I think I might melt down. I tell myself, 'I need to let it out,' but it feels like the tears are stuck inside me. I can see doomsday visions in my mind, if I let it run free; and I don't want to think that could ever happen. I always thought that America was safe from

terrorism. I never thought it could happen here, and especially not on such a large scale. I'm scared for my children, and I don't know how to explain it to them.

This is the last one, from a woman named Cookie:

I'm from Boston, and let me tell you that my anxiety level has peaked this week—particularly this weekend, when it seemed another terrorist's attack was likely. I have all sorts of new thoughts of doom and gloom. I did think our country was insulated from this type of attack. Now it just makes me wonder what else we might not be prepared for. I try to believe that this was a wake-up call, and we will be forever vigilant as a result. It's the only way I can get any peace of mind. When planes fly over my house (which they usually do every five minutes), I wonder if every plane is authorized. It's a horrible way to live, and it's really hard to be rational when everyone is being irrational.

I think that we, in God's church, are *so blessed!* We know the antidote to these fears. We have it, and we can use it. We do not need to be stuck in fear, and anxiety, and depression. The answer is actually very simple, but it requires too much faith to be effective to those people who are in the world (who have not been called, who have not had the truth revealed to them). But it can work for us.

Through the rest of the sermon today I want to look at God's antidotes to fears that lead to depression. So it is both *fear* and *depression* that we will solve today. I say that kind of a smile, because I will not give every answer. But this is the beginning point—the spiritual beginning point—for conquering our fears and depression.

I am going to do a little bit more reading, because I found another thing off the Internet. This man explains the reasons for fears and depression. The title of this is really long. It sounds like something out of a psychological journal. "Combating Post Traumatic Stress, Depression and Suicidal Thoughts in the Aftermath of the Terrorist Attacks on the New York World Trade Center and

the Pentagon on September 11, 2001" is the entire title. The man's name is Stephen L. Bernhardt. I am going to jump through this, just to pick out the highlights.

Make no mistake, there will be many cases of Acute Stress Disorder (short term) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (long term and more severe) as a result of these attacks. It may even reach national epidemic proportions. . . .

Traumatic memories are stored in the emotional unconscious in the implicit form, and are less influenced by cognitive thought, or reason and logic. [Meaning, it is stored there and we have a hard time affecting it by just reasoning through it.] The triggers that will cause a flashback are anything which reminds us of the traumatic event. . .

It could be something as simple as a child pretending that he is flying; and we will be reminded of, let us say, a picture we saw of someone tumbling out of the World Trade Center while it was on fire. That will cause a flashback.

In addition to the emotional flashback, many people experience autonomic responses which may include: feeling detached or emotionally numb; constant anxiety or panic; [being] irritable and more aggressive; easily startled; hyperactive or hyperstressed; [having] sleep problems and nightmares. . .

Most people will have some of these symptoms for a few weeks (maybe up to two months) and that will be the end of it, except possibly on the anniversary of the event. Others may experience flashbacks even years after the event.

The two prime reasons that a person becomes depressed are: a loss of control over their life situation and of their emotions, and secondly, a loss of a positive sense of their future (loss of hope).

The fact that our emotional and autonomic responses to trauma are independent of our cognitive input places undue stress on our

conscious mind and we begin to feel a loss of control. We do not understand why this is happening to us, and negative ruminations about our inability to control this process causes further loss of control of our emotions.

It is a cycle that keeps on repeating, because we keep reminding ourselves that we do not have any control. We begin to lose hope that we will ever again control of our emotional and autonomic responses.

As we begin to lose control of our emotional response, the unconscious mind will initiate a protective depressive response so that our lack of emotional control will not destroy us. Yet the protection afforded us by the depressive response is short lived if our conscious mind cannot solve the problem and alleviate the stress. In that case, the depression itself becomes debilitating; and we are at risk of becoming suicidal in order to escape from the pain of depression and lack of control.

Those people who were already suffering from depression when the New York World Trade Center and Pentagon were attacked by terrorists, are especially at risk of becoming further depressed and of triggering suicidal thoughts. The depressed will tend to personalize the terrorist attack to the point of it confirming that they are not in control and there is no hope left in their future.

That is as far as I want to go with that quotation. I want to just highlight one thing that he said. He said that people become depressed for two prime reasons: (1) that they feel a loss of control over both their lives and their emotions. And, (2) they lose a positive sense of their future. In other words, they lose hope.

The answer to the first one is paradoxical when you look at it on the surface. The key to overcoming this *feeling of loss of control over our lives* is to admit that we are *not* in control! First of all, there are things that are totally out of our control. Can you control the weather? Can you control earthquakes? Can you control war? Can you control disease? Can you control accidents? Can you control economic turmoil? Can you control

social unrest? I could name many other things that are totally out of our control.

We do not have control over these things. These things are bigger than one person—indeed, bigger than many people! And though there are some people who have some control over some of these things, for us (the weak of the world, the foolish, the ignoble, or whatever we are)—we hardly have any control over anything that happens in the greater world around us. So we have to stop feeling responsible for the way things turn out, because we had nothing to do with them.

Of course, there are things that we do have control over, and we are responsible for those things. But these other events and occurrences and happenings, disasters or whatever you want to call them—they happen for other reasons. We have nothing to do with them, and we could not have stopped them if we had tried. So we have to stop feeling responsible.

Feeling responsible for those things is very futile, for one; and it is also very self-centered. You feel that you can control things. It is almost *idolatrous*, because who is the one who is in control? *God is in control!* He is Sovereign over all. And if we think that we should be "in control," what are we telling God? It is a very proud thing to think that we have control over these things over which we do not have control. We are making ourselves much more important than we actually are in the great scheme of things.

So, as I have already said, God is really in control. That is the important thing in this idea of becoming depressed because we have lost control. God is the one who is in control; and all of His actions are designed and directed towards our ultimate good. He is not doing things just because He feels like it—on a whim. He has a plan. That plan is not only worldwide, and mankind-wide, in scope. It is also personal and individual. And so not only is His purpose for mankind's ultimate good, so that most of us are able to receive the promises, He has also promised these things individually, personally to us. So we know that He is working in our behalf to bring us the most good in the end.

So, we must *humble ourselves* and admit that we are not ultimately in control. By admitting this, we can begin to have peace of mind. We certainly

contribute to the direction of our own lives. I do not want to make it sound like a person has no control over anything, because that is not true. We do have control over our own decisions. We should have control over what we allow ourselves to do. But these greater matters that impact our lives—things that we fall into out of just sheer being in the place that we are, at the time that we are—is not our fault.

I am speaking in rather "ideal" terms—that we are not in control. That is, in the great overall march of history and the greater plan of God. We have to remember that the things that we have no control over are *not* our fault. *If* we admit that and humble ourselves before God (and not think of ourselves so highly that we think we are in control), *then* we have made the first step in shedding a lot of this stress and pressure that is on us.

Let us see from things from the Bible that I hope will prove these things to you. Please turn to Proverbs 19, where Solomon writes:

Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil.

You might say, "This doesn't seem to apply very much." But it actually does. Understanding the fear of the Lord, which is having a proper reverence for God, because of how great He is compared to us—that is, understanding our comparative worth, how great He is compared to how insignificant we are—gives us, then, the proper perspective on life. So, that is the first part. "The fear of the Lord leads to life." The fear of the Lord—having the proper perspective of ourselves versus God—will lead to life.

Then it says that *if* we have this proper perspective, *then* we will abide in satisfaction. We will be satisfied with the way God is directing us. First you have to have that right understanding of how we are in comparison to God. That is the way, then, that leads towards life—eternal life! And *if* we have thus admitted this, *then* we see our life in satisfactory terms. We do not think that we have been given the short end. We do not think that we have lost control. We have actually said, "God, *You* are in control." And that is very satisfying to the human psyche.

The last bit there, he says, "Such a person will not be visited with evil." To put it another way, such a person will know that everything that happens to him is for his good. (Just turn it around, and make it more positive.) We know that God has promised—in Psalm 91, and other places—that He will keep us from evil. We have that assurance. So we can go blithely on with our lives, and not have these great stresses, and pressures, and worries, and depressions that might come upon us because of various factors or things that happen in the world.

Let us go to Isaiah 48. This is speaking primarily to Israel, and God's redemption of Israel, and things that will be happening in the end time. But I want us to take this more personally, of course.

Isaiah 48:17-18 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

I pulled those pretty much out of context, but they do apply to us personally. First of all, God is teaching us to profit. I am not talking monetarily here. I am talking about *benefits*. He is teaching us the way that will benefit us the most.

Then he says that He leads us in the right way. He is our Redeemer. He loves us. He bought us with everything He had. And so, we have this assurance from Him that not only is He teaching us the way that is going to give the right benefits, but He is also leading us in the way where we will end up in the best situation for us. That is very reassuring! He is not only *instructing* us, but He is also *leading* us—guiding us, with us, directing us.

He says that *if* we follow His lead, He will practically drown us in peace. That is what verse 18 says. "If only you had kept My commandments, then your peace would have been like a river—like the waves of the sea." Do you understand what He is saying there? "If you follow My directions, if you go the way that I say to go, then you are going to have so much peace and contentment in your life that these depressions (these fears, these anxieties)

can't even get close to you." That is because you have that *right perspective*. God is in charge. He is leading us. His way is right. And ultimately, everything will be taken care of.

Now to the New Testament. This is the Sermon on the Mount. This is from the lips of our own Savior, our Redeemer—the One who paid the price for us. You cannot have better Authority than this, right here.

Matthew 6:25-30 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life [Get rid of your anxiety. "Have no anxious thought," He says, in the King James.], what you will eat or what you will drink [Your needs, as far as maintaining your body.]; nor about your body, what you will put on [about your clothing]. Is not life [or, the life that we are to live; and that which we are going towards] more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [Of course, you are!] Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? [Meaning, it does not do anything productive. It actually is destructive, not constructive.] So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Remember I said that this way of getting rid of our depressions and our fears takes a great deal of *faith*. That is why it will not work for somebody who has not been called and had this revealed to them. But we have! We have this "factor" that can allow us to live; I would not say "worry free," because we need stresses. We need things to make us change and grow. But at least, we will have them in control.

Matthew 6:31-32 "Therefore do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek."

You know that! Look out your door some day, and see what the people out in the world are doing. They are scurrying to and fro. Here in America, we work zillions of hours every year. We are at the very top of the world's list of nations in hours worked per year. I think there may be only one nation that works more than us, but I am not sure. But we are right at the top. We spend all of our time working to have. It has gone way beyond food, and drink, and clothing. Now, it is houses, and Nintendo, and on and on. (Tickets to NASCAR races and things like that.)

That is the thing that people "out there" do. They are busy trying to get more for themselves, because they are worried that they will not have enough—either now, or in the future. They are putting their nest egg away for their retirement. They want to live at the same level that they are living now, while they are working. So the Gentiles (which is a code word for the unconverted at this point) are out there worried to the tops of their heads that they will not have these things. They are just *full of anxieties*.

Matthew 6:32 "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

Of course He does. He created us to have these needs—needs of food, of drink, of clothing, of shelter. He knows, and He provides. Now, here is the instruction. What are we to do, if we are not supposed to be worried about all these things?

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

So the lesson is: *If* we keep our nose in the Book, *if* we are out there applying what we have learned, *if* we are meditating on God's way, *if* we are practicing love towards one another, and doing all the things we are supposed to be doing (growing, overcoming)—*then* God will take care of us. He says, "You get your priorities straight, and I'll take up the slack."

I can see some people saying, "Well, if I quit my job and spend all my time studying, then God is sure to give me all these things; because He promises right here." No, He does not say that. We also have priorities in terms of providing for our families. There is a balance to this. But *if* we do it right, *if*

we have the proper balance of seeking God's Kingdom as our first priority and becoming righteous (which is just doing what is good and godly), *then* He gives us the blessings that we need. It is guaranteed.

Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. [We have enough daily pressures and stresses for today. We do not need to worry about all those that are coming up in the future.] Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Ain't that true! Take care of what you can today, and tomorrow you will take care of what you can tomorrow. So do not get all stressed out about next week, or next month, or next year. Seek first the Kingdom; and then you will have the armament and the weaponry to face those things. And we know Romans 8:28 declares that everything works out for the good of *the* called, if they love God. That is just another way of saying what Jesus said here. We can count on that. *If* we have our priorities straight, *then* He will take care of those little nagging anxieties that we all face just simply by being human.

I Peter 5:5-7 Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

I Peter 5:10-11 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. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In a way, this encapsulates what I have been saying here. We can transfer the burden of our anxieties to God—if we humble ourselves before Him, and we understand that He is in control, and when we know that He has promised to take care of us in these things.

I found this word “cares” to be a very interesting little word. It is *melei* in the Greek. It means to be concerned for. God is concerned for us. It also means

to be interested in. God is interested in us. He takes an interest in each of us. It also means to have regard for. You can even say there is an amount of respect there because He knows what we are, and He knows what we can become. Then, finally, it means to care for as one would care for a son or a daughter. He knows us. He loves us. And better than any human father has ever done (in the past, the present, or the future), He takes care of us. It is so simple. Leave your fears with Him.

Now, I read verses 10-11 because I also wanted you to see that He does not say that (if we do that) we will not have stresses and fears and anxieties at all. That is not what He says. He says that we are going to *suffer a while*. There is one way that you can take this that is not very encouraging. You could take it to mean that you are going to suffer for a *little* while; but it could mean that you are going to suffer *all your life*, because to God that is just a little while. But He promises that with the suffering comes perfection, being established, being strengthened and settled.

So we cannot just say, "Oh, I'll cast all my cares upon God; and I'm going to live the life of Riley." That is not how it works! We have to understand the realities of the matter. God is in it to perfect us—**to make us like Him**. And we are a long way from that. So He has to run us through these series of sufferings, and trials, and what have you—to bring out the perfect son at the other end of those experiences.

So, even though we cast all our cares upon God because He cares for us, we also have to remember that He has a greater purpose; and that greater purpose entails suffering for a little while. That includes stresses and pressures and trials and tribulations, and those sorts of things. We are promised that we are going to have to face them, but we can face them with the *right perspective*. That is, that God is in control, and He is going to make everything come out 'better than all right' in the end. Paul puts the capstone on this in Philippians 4. Here he gives us the formula, or the pattern, of *how to cast our cares upon God*.

Philippians 4:6-7 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.

So what does he say? How do we cast our cares upon God, and come out with peace of mind? He says, "Go to God in prayer, and let Him know what is going on in your life. Let Him know the things that you need. Let Him know how you feel about these things. Let Him know how you think it should work out." And then we can leave those burdens before His throne. And His peace can be our peace. We can just leave them there. We do not necessarily need to worry about them, because we have presented them to Him and He will take care of them then.

Paul does not mention it, but God often gives us answers as we pray. He brings scriptures to mind that we can apply. Or, if it is not while we are in prayer—maybe it is while we are in study, or maybe it is while we are in meditation (a little bit later on, when you are thinking about these things). We come up with a solution that drains the stress away, because we solve the problem. That is why we can leave them there. We can rest assured—be at peace—that the answer is there, and that God is working this out. We do not need to be all stressed about it, and feel like the end of the world has come upon us. The peace that we can have—the peace of God—is the same peace that Jesus left with His disciples.

John 14:27 "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."

The reason why there was so much peace there was because there was the knowledge that He had overcome the world and that He was going to die for our sins. He would then be raised and ascend to God's right hand as our High Priest, who knows all our weaknesses. He knows the frailties of man. He knows the things that we go through, day by day. So we have a Mediator and an Intercessor there for us—that knows us inside and out because He was one of us. That is just further reassurance that we will get the best hearing before God (of our problems, of our situation, of whatever is facing us), and that there will be a solution that comes out of it; and that just gives wonderful *peace of mind*.

Now, notice one more thing about this peace of mind. Notice the last thing that Paul says here. It says that it "*will* guard your hearts and minds." That is in the future tense. It is not just the peace of mind that soothes us right now, but there is a future benefit for us in that. It protects us from future anxiety attacks, future stresses. The reason it does that is because, when these things happen again, we are already in the right attitude to face them.

Once we get the peace of God, and have that right understanding of it, then, when these things happen again, we better understand how they are working. So we are not thrown for a loop in our heart, our emotions. We are not thrown for a loop in our mind—which is our reasoning processes. We do not go all to pieces, because we have seen how God works. And so, not only is it a protection right now, but it is a cumulative thing that (over a lifetime) we should be able to be in that state of God's peace just about all the time.

That is hard to do. Remember that I am talking in ideal terms here. Everybody has to face these things themselves, personally—with their own background, and problems, and such. But this is the theology of how this works.

So the antidote for feeling that we have lost control is to believe that God is in control. True conviction of God's sovereignty (which is what I have just been talking about) leaves us with assurance of good for the future, and thus we have peace of mind. And knowing this should elate us! (Not depress us.) And if we are already depressed, we should be pulled right out of that depression because of understanding that God is in charge. He is working, and He wants the best for us.

The second reason for depression, as this man said, is *loss of hope*. People feel excessively pessimistic about their future. This point deals with a person's general outlook on life and his vision of the future. As Christians to whom God has revealed Himself and His plan (for us as well as all mankind), we should be the most **optimistic** and **hopeful** people on earth (even amidst terrorists' attacks, and war, anthrax, and whatnot that might come upon the American people). We should still be optimistic, and still be hopeful for what is coming. We, as Christians, really have very little excuse for *pessimism* and *depression*. I think the only reason why we get that way is

because we stray from this peace of God that He has given us and, of course, having the right and proper perspective of God and what He is doing.

Let us go back to Proverbs. We will be spending a little bit of time in this book. Solomon gives a few little gems of wisdom on this.

Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

This is just a fact of life. When a thing is expected, and we have been expecting it for a while, and it repeatedly is delayed (or it never comes at all), we feel severe disappointment. We feel discouragement, and frustration, and misery. This word "heart sick" means, "makes the heart feel woe." Is that not sad? And it is true! If we have wanted something really badly, and it just never comes and never comes; and finally we find out that it is never coming at all—oh, man, that can really depress you (or, at least, get you down).

Some feel this way because Christ has not returned yet. Did you know that? Some people are discouraged that Christ has not come back. But such depression is not according to God's revelation. Where in the Bible does it say that Christ will return in *your* lifetime? What did He really say? He said that we know not the day or the hour, and that He will come like a thief in the night.

We know that this is the end time; but we do not know that we will be here to see it happen—ourselves, personally. There is so much that could occur between now and then. And, yes, His return is nearer than when we first believed. But are we going to be here? It is up to God. We do not know. So, yes, "hope deferred makes the heart sick." And think—if we do live till that time when He returns—it will be a tree of life to us. But we have to deal with this *deferred hope* right here and now, because He has not come back yet. We still have the hope, do we not? And it is still very sure.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation [or, vision], the people cast off restraint [or perish, or run wild]; but happy is he who keeps the law.

Notice the result here of people who do not have vision. Remember, I said that this point has to do with our vision of the future, our outlook on life, our viewpoint. What happens when people lose a proper vision? And the word *revelation* here is very good, because it is talking about God's revelation—the prophetic revelation of God's plan. That is, the vision that we have been given by God of the way things are going to work out—whether in specific terms or in general terms, it does not matter.

The result of people who do not have this is that they run wild, or they cast off restraint, or (as the King James says) they perish. In general terms, then, if people do not have the right vision of the future—God's vision of the future—they fall into all kinds of aberrant, unlawful, self-destructive behaviors; and they end (where the King James did) in death—in perishing. And this could go as far as the second death. Not just dying here and now in the physical, but totally ruining one's chance. It could go that far.

So we see here that we have to have a proper understanding and vision, so that we can conduct our life in the proper, godly way. And that is what is said there in the second part of this proverb. "Happy is he who keeps the law." Law here is *torah*. Torah, in a technical sense, means the five books of Moses. But in the general sense it means simply *teaching*, or *instruction*, or *direction*—and the unspoken part of this is from God. So, what is said here? "Blessed is the person who keeps God's direction." Or "who lives under God's direction." Or "who follows God's instruction."

And so, even though the word hope is not in the verse, we have a kind of formula—a kind of general way of looking at things—that will lead us to *a blessed life*. If we follow God's law (that being the general term for all of His instructions), *then* we do not have to worry. We have a wonderful future before us. A blessed life! And, of course, for us that means the Kingdom of God and eternal life. That is going to be a life that is absolutely free of pain, and crying, and fears, and depression. You read that in Revelation 21.

Proverbs and the Psalms are just chock-full of hope and ways in which we can lead hopeful lives. Proverbs 23:17-18 brings out four very pertinent points on this "lost of hope."

Proverbs 23:17-18 Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off.

The first thing here is that *envy of others leads to discouragement*. Remember, in II Corinthians 10:12, Paul says that it is not wise to compare yourselves among yourselves. Well, this is the reason—because there is always going to be disparages between you and somebody else. And so you are going to get envious, let us say, because that person has something that you do not have. And so it is going to depress you, in a certain way. It will make you down. It will make you think that God has been unfair to you, and that you deserve more.

This is particularly looking at a person who has the truth looking at somebody who does not have the truth. It says, "envy sinners" here. A person who has had God's revelation knows that God is working with him, and that He gives us what we need. And because we have read that in I Peter 5:10, we know that we are not going to be given all the things that the people in the world can have—because we have been sent here to *suffer a little* while we are perfected, and established, and strengthened. So it is likely that, if we compare ourselves with sinners, we are going to feel that we have not been given all the blessings that we should have been given. "Don't even do it," Paul says. "It's not wise."

The second thing here is *the fear of the Lord*. That is a major factor, again, in combating loss of hope. You have to have that right perspective of God and us. There should be a constant awareness of God's sovereignty and power and love for us that continually *feeds our hope*. If we remember God, then that hope should come springing to mind. "God's on my side! I have nothing to fear. What can man do to me?"

The third thing is that Solomon here says *there is a hereafter*. There is more to life than this life. There is more going on than just our physical existence. So not all of our expectations are going to be met here and now—especially because the ones we are really hoping for we could not enjoy if God gave them to us now. We have to wait until we are changed to fully enjoy and

understand the benefits that we will have when God clothes us with His glory. Those are the things we are really looking for. Of course, our primary hope is in the resurrection from the dead to eternal life.

The fourth thing here, the last clause, *our hope is certain*. It is backed up by the Almighty God! How can we doubt Him? If He says that our hope is certain, then our hope is certain. He will not go back on His word. He is not a man that He should lie.

So we have these four factors:

1. Do not compare yourself to others, because it will produce envy—and, therefore, depression.
2. We have to remember the fear of the Lord.
3. There is a hereafter. We do have that great promise that has been given to us. So we cannot expect everything to come now, because God is saving those things for the future.
4. We have a certain, assured, hope—because God is the guarantor of it.

I do want to notice, in the time that I have left, how David approached being down.

Psalm 43:1-2 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength. Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

The first two verses are where he is showing his discouragement. Now, he is going to talk to himself and put himself back into the right attitude.

Psalm 43:3-5 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! [He is speaking to God.] Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O

God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

We return to God and His way when we remember the light and the truth that God has revealed to us. That means going back to what He has told us in His Word—to the promises that He has given. Often times, discouragement comes when we forget. That is, when we have not been thinking about these things. And so David says, "Send out Your light and Your truth again to me. Open my mind again to these things, so that I understand the wonders of it—and the hope that is there. If I can just go back and learn again, and read again, and think about again—those things that You've taught me; then I'm going to be right back at Your altar—giving you praise and thanks, and probably repenting as well (for forgetting and going astray). And, then, my hope will return." He has gotten his "fix," let us say, of the proper perspective. Then he is set on the right track once again.

You might want to jot down Romans 5:1-5. This is, in a sense, the theological basis for our hope. It simply begins that we have been *justified* by Christ's blood through faith. Thus, we are reconciled to God. We are at peace with Him. Because of that, we have access to His grace—through faith, once again. So we rejoice in our hope, because our hope is God's glory. We know that we will be given God's glory because He has given to us His Holy Spirit, which is the earnest (or the down payment) of that full glory that He will give us in the resurrection.

So this gives us a proper, godly perspective on life. We understand the purpose of trials and suffering. We know, then, that these things are designed to produce *endurance* and *character* in us—and, it says, *hope*. All these things lead to hope. And so proof after proof pile up as we go through our converted lives—to show that God is what He is, and will do what He says. Our hope increases exponentially as we learn these things and apply God's way to our lives.

Of course, I Corinthians 15:12-22 explains that the resurrection from the dead is our hope. It is there. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and that is solid proof that we will follow in His steps (in also being resurrected).

So the antidote to feeling a loss of hope is remembering the *assurance of our hope* in Christ, which is backed by the almighty power and faithfulness of God. Meditating on those things—that God is behind that promise and our hope—should destroy any despondency, or depression, that we might let ourselves fall into.

Psalm 16:5-11 O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance. [A great inheritance! A wonderful inheritance!] I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel. My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.