

Your Divine Prescription for Hope for the New Year

If someone had told us in advance that 2020 would look as devastating as it has, we wouldn't have believed them. At least, we would have had serious questions. The events of the past year sound like a wish list for the Grim Reaper.

The impeachment trial of the president of the United States took place in the U.S. Senate.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged by 1, points, or 4.4%, to close at 25,, triggered by fears of the spread of COVID-19.

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 passed 47 million worldwide.

Many small business owners lost their companies and thousands throughout the country were laid off or lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

Protests and violence caused by the killing of George Floyd broke out across cities in the U.S. and around the world.

Churches were forced to close and when reopened, had to meet a strict criteria of social interaction mandates from the state.

And if this weren't enough, we endured the most divisive and hotly contentious presidential election since the Civil War, one that split the nation in half.

When you stop and think about it, the hour seems to closely resemble Habakkuk's cry to God in the first chapter of his Old Testament book.

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Or cry to You, ‘Violence!’ and You will not save? Why do You make me see wickedness, and cause me to see trouble? Plundering and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore injustice proceeds” (Hab. 1:2-4).

Talk about anxiety, fear and discouragement! Habakkuk was a man on the edge with God. He complained about society falling apart around him and God seemed to not listen to his prayer. If this is what Habakkuk was feeling, I can only wonder what some others around him must have been going through. They must have thought the sky was falling and God had taken a vacation!

The fact is, what Habakkuk witnessed and what we see today in real time are very similar. The United States, though the greatest, most industrial and most powerful nation on the planet, is not without its blemishes or its propensity toward sin. What appears to be the silence of God as the country flails in self-destruction mode is, in reality, the patient timing of a fifth Great Awakening about to break forth.

God said in Chapters 1 and 2 of the book (and I’m taking liberty here): “‘You wouldn’t believe it if I told you.’ I’m going to use the ungodly Babylonians to do my bidding. Write this truth down, Habakkuk, so others can read it, because this truth waits for an appointed time. It talks about the end of all of this you’re witnessing; you’ll see. The enemy is rotten, sinful and puffed up. But you have to get this, Habakkuk—the righteous person will live by his faithfulness!”

We need to grasp what God is saying to Habakkuk here. If not, we’ll miss the real power and strength we need to be victorious in this crazy world. God said, “the righteous person will live by his faithfulness” (Hab. 2:4b, NIV). That means through consistency, commitment and steadfastness, we’ll see God’s goodness happen before our very eyes because of our

loyalty to Him. The world may become unhinged, but believers in Jesus will feast off their faithfulness to God, and God Himself will prove faithful. It's then that Habakkuk gets it, and in Chapter 3, begins to cry out for revival. He ends the chapter in verse 19 by coming alive: "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."

Habakkuk finally caught what God was saying. As a result, God did great things—and so will He do for you as well.

Real-Life Issues

The mental health toll from the coronavirus on individuals, couples, families, employment, businesses, pastors, churches, missionaries, schools and medical workers has been nothing short of devastating, to say the least. Here's some clinical information to add perspective.

Research from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey from May 2020 to July 2020 indicates symptoms of anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder shot up from 34.5% in May to 40.1% in July. The survey was conducted on adults ages 18 and older.

The Census Bureau survey said that more than one-third of Americans are displaying clinical signs of anxiety, depression or both since the coronavirus pandemic began. A Pew Research Center survey said this figure was as high as 55%. Loneliness from pandemic-related isolation and lockdowns also plays a part in depression.

The economy is now a significant source of stress for 70% of Americans, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). This is up from 46% in the APA's 2019 Stress in America survey.

And this comes on top of the uptick in marital issues and divorce from the pandemic. Marriage therapists, both secular

and Christian, have been busier counseling couples than they ever have been.

And this doesn't include depleted savings accounts, homeowners falling behind in mortgage payments and churches experiencing decreased giving.

These are all real-life issues that face every one of us irrespective of our faith, socioeconomic status, physical and emotional well-being or political persuasion. There is also no doubt that "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12b, MEV) are trying their best to disrupt our lives and rob us of our promises and authority in Christ. In other words, this stuff is affecting all of us!

So yes, when you spell it all out, things do look rather dismal on the surface—or do they?

Divine Favor

When we read the story of Noah and the flood, we often read it one-dimensionally. In reality, this story has another fascinating, life-giving side—a bigger, more meaningful side.

The flood story in Genesis 6-8 gives us a pretty clear-cut message. Sin and depravity had gone wild, to the extent that God says in Genesis 6:7, "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the birds of the sky, for I am sorry that I have made them."

When Dad wishes he'd never had you, that's a pretty bad thing. Yet that's how crazy wicked the human race had become. But look, here's the best part of the story: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8, NIV).

If we don't take a deliberate look at this, we'll miss what's really going on here. With all of the ugly and destructive things happening around Noah, he found favor, grace and

acceptance with God. That's important for us to see. If we miss that—the favor, grace and acceptance part of how God feels about us—then all we end up seeing is the bad stuff around us and not the good and redemptive plans He is preparing in the background.

As God is getting ready to flood everything around Noah, He spares Noah and his entire family because of favor. But when we read this, our minds are caught up more in the devastating flood than the story's main theme: rescue.

Through difficult and trying times, whether physiologically, psychologically, occupationally, politically, relationally or spiritually, God's intention, plan, purpose and desire is to show favor to you through the battle. His ultimate goal is to bring rescue, and from that, new life!

Without faith in God's favor and rescue in our lives, marriages, finances, jobs and mental stability, all we have is the destruction around us and not the goodness of the Lord working on our behalf. Trust me, God isn't in heaven wringing His hands saying, "Whoops! Sorry, I missed that one!" We need to know something important at the outset of 2021: God is in control. Let me say that again: God is totally in control. Nothing has escaped God's eyes, and everything is in perfect order for His plan.

"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him" (Ps. 91:14-15, ESV).

Moses wrote this psalm the day he completed building the tabernacle in the desert (Ex. 39). He was awestruck as he entered the holy place, reflecting on everything God had brought the Israelites through under extreme and even impossible conditions. In the end, Yahweh brought Moses favor and rescued him and all of Israel from certain death. This

goes to show that it's never over until God says it's over, and God never says it's over!

"I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5b, MEV).

The enemy wants us to think God just isn't going to come through for us, our families, our economic condition or even our country. He tells us somehow COVID-19, political unrest, an unstable economy, job loss, a contentious presidential election and worries over where our country is headed will prevail in the end. No, they won't! We must move our eyes from the wreckage around us to the rescue God is planning. If we don't, our adversary will try to imprison us in fear while God has lavished us in favor. Because of Christ and His work of redemption in our lives, we are a righteous and blameless people who have received grace as a result of Christ's shed blood on the cross.

It's interesting to note that those three descriptions of Noah—receiving grace (favor), being righteous and being blameless—appear for the first time in Genesis 6. Verse 9c says, "Noah walked with God," and so do we. Not unlike Noah, each Christian walks with God in the midst of immorality and political devastation. And we must lock into our hearts that even though all these things go on around us, God's favor and grace are on His people. Even though it may look like things won't work out, hold on. They will, and God will make sure of it.

Remember, things didn't look good for Abraham, and in particular, Isaac. It was sacrifice time, and Isaac was the sacrifice! The whole experience was breaking Abraham's heart. and no doubt Isaac was a little anxious too. But when the time was right—and with God, the right time always comes—Yahweh showed Abraham favor, grace and rescue by providing a ram in the thicket as an alternative sacrifice for his beloved son. God came through! Perhaps with tears in Abraham's eyes, hoping but not 100% sure things would turn out well for him, he

believed. As a result, he saw the goodness of Yahweh's favor in his life and the life of his son. God is never without options, so we are never without hope.

Viable Alternatives

God provided a shelter, a rescue from the storm for Noah and his family. He is going to do the same thing for you and your family. Depression and anxiety are real and affect many people both inside and outside of the body of Christ.

As a licensed mental health professional, I've gotten in trouble with some evangelical charismatics in the past, but I believe firmly in what I'm about to say. I've seen it work and work well. If you find you just can't shake your depression, anxiety or both, you need to know there are viable alternatives to help you emotionally maintain and in many cases, maintain well through the storm.

Pray first, of course. Include your spouse, family member, friend and pastor on your prayer team. If you still find you are struggling, I suggest you talk to a licensed clinical Christian counselor who can help walk you through the rough spots. They may suggest you talk with your primary doctor to consider other options that could prove very helpful.

Depression and anxiety come in two types: situational and genetic. Either the onset was brought about by a particular situation such as the loss of a job, marital issues or pressures at home, or the onset came through heredity. Perhaps your mom had depression/anxiety problems and so did your grandmother on your mom's side and Uncle Charlie and Aunt Bertha as well. Either way, viable and helpful options are available. Remember, Jesus chose a physician, Luke, as both an apostle and an evangelist. Also, it was Jesus who said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Luke 5:31b, NIV).

If you suffer from mental illness, do not allow anyone to

place you under guilt or shame as you seek help. There are options that can assist you, and you are not unspiritual in seeking them out. As a matter of fact, you're demonstrating wisdom. The outcome could prove very beneficial. There are also some all-natural products that may help you as well.

David put it best in Psalm 30:5: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." In this verse, "his favor" refers to God's grace and acceptance, which will work in you for a "lifetime"! Though the darkness of the night comes at times, stay encouraged because with God, there's always the promise of the dawn. Be expectant—divine rescue is on the way!

READ MORE: For additional information about a Christ-centered approach to mental health, check out .

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