

Why I Am Not Discouraged

There is no shortage of bad news today, on both the national and global level. The political scene—in particular, the presidential race—is as muddy as it is muddled, while the division between Right and Left continues to intensify. Anti-Jewish sentiments, both here and abroad, have risen to frighteningly high and deeply dangerous levels, while fears of a major world war continue to grow. And I’m just getting started. There is more than enough depressing news to keep us frustrated, hopeless and downright miserable.

That’s why it was no surprise to learn that, according to a recent poll, CNBC reported that “66% of Americans say they’re ‘pessimistic, now and for the future’—a record high in the 17-year history of the survey.” In sum, the poll stated, “We’ve never found people more depressed.”

Why, then, do I remain encouraged, full of faith and confidence, in the midst of these difficult times?

It’s not simply that I’m hardwired to be an optimist (although that certainly helps). And it’s not simply that things are going well in my life, my family and my ministry (although I am profoundly grateful to God for His kindness).

Instead, there is one foundational thing that keeps me full of faith and confidence, namely, *the nature of God*.

As stated in 1 John 1:5b (NIV), “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” Or, in the words of Jacob (James), He is “the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17b).

Not only so, but in His presence is fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11), which means that as we worship Him and gaze on Him, that joy becomes ours as well, a joy that is not dependent on

circumstances.

That's why the psalmist said, "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous" (Ps. 112:4).

Because of *Him*—because of who He is—I am not depressed or discouraged.

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This reminds me of an experience I had as a fairly new believer back in 1972.

Our little congregation was fond of singing the old hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," beginning with the words, "Great is thy faithfulness, Oh God my Father/ There is no shadow of turning with Thee/ Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not/ As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be."

The chorus then declared, "Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness/ Morning by morning new mercies I see/ All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided/ Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."

What I didn't know as I sang this old classic (which was quite a change from the music I had been immersed in during the previous years, such as Led Zeppelin's "Dazed and Confused" and Jimi Hendrix's, "Purple Haze") was that the main text was taken directly from the Bible.

That's why it was quite a revelation for me to discover that, right in the midst of the book of Lamentations, one of the most painful and dark biblical books, the prophet declared: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:22–23)

Bear in mind that this same book contains haunting images of destruction and despair, the result of Judah's sins against the Lord. As a result, terrible judgment came, leaving the people in a broken and decimated state.

Just consider for a moment how agonizing the moment was: "The elders of Daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground. My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, 'Where is bread and wine?' as they faint like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms" (Lam. 2:10–12).

The prophet's personal sufferings were acute as well, as he described the effect on God's wrath on his own life: "He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink. He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, 'My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord'" (Lam. 3:13–18).

But that is not all he had to say—and this is what struck me so dramatically back in 1972 when reading through the whole Bible the first time.

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It was in the midst of this darkness, this living hell, something far worse than most of us have lived through, that he also said this: "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not

consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:19-23).

Yes, he was saying, my situation is dire. Yes, he affirmed, the pain of my people is overwhelming. As a result, he confessed that he was downcast and discouraged.

But he didn't stop there. He remembered the Lord's great love. He remembered the nature of God. He reflected on His mercy and goodness, and rather than complain, He offered praise: "Great is Your faithfulness! Your mercies are new every morning." (This is something worth chewing on. As surely as the sun rises every single day, God's mercies arise afresh as well.)

And so he strengthens his own heart, declaring, "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. 3:24-26).

Because of this, he will patiently endure, full of hope and without fear (see 3:27-40).

Those of us living today, more than 2,500 years after Lamentations was written and nearly 2,000 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus have further reason to be encouraged.

The Son of God died for our sins and rose from the dead. And because He rose, we know that every purpose of God will ultimately come to pass and that every device of the devil will ultimately be thwarted.

For me, this is the foundation of my encouragement and hope—not the only cause of it but the foundation of it. I encourage you to take hold of these divine realities for yourself!

If you are in right relationship with God through faith in

Jesus the Messiah, then you too can say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

The answer is clear: no one!

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Dr. Michael Brown () is the host of the nationally syndicated Line of Fire radio program. His latest book is "Revival Or We Die: A Great Awakening Is Our Only Hope." Connect with him on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.