



— HOW TO LIVE —

THE BEST TIMES

IN THE WORST TIMES

• RENÉ PEÑALBA •

HOW TO LIVE THE BEST TIMES IN THE WORST TIMES



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FOREWORD

The words of Charles Dickens are a good place to start this book. He was a famous English novelist recognized in Universal Literature. He had an unfortunate childhood which did not stop him from writing great works like *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. I want to refer to one of his great works that starts like this: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..."

It is a fact that human beings can provoke conditions in their own lives so that the worst times and circumstances turn into blessings, despite challenges surrounding them and despite living in conflicting environments.

Somehow these words remind me of a portion of the scriptures written by Salomon about the terms and challenges that constitute life. In the book of ***Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verses 1-8***, we read:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

This portion of the scriptures poses the ideal scenario in which life changes occur in the perfect time and opportune moment! It reads like this: *"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens"*. You probably think that this hardly ever happens if at all. But this book will show you how you can contribute to deactivate the adverse and afflicting events in your life, and promote favorable conditions instead.

The word "time" and the phrase "opportune moments" originate from the Hebrew word, "zemán" that in general means "designated occasion". There is nothing better than things happening in the designated occasion, instead of abruptly! That is what the text seems to suggest.

What role do we play in the creation of the best conditions for that which we call destiny?

We are responsible for administering our life in the best possible way, regarding attitudes, decisions, and performances. It seems so simple; however, people ruin the best moment and the opportune occasions for their happiness! they threaten their history by creating adverse conditions to later complain about God and about life itself! If only we could be the wiser and realize how much of our own doing promotes evil more than goodness in our life history!

With this thought in mind, let us consider the following question that constitutes the first chapter of this book.

Chapter 1

HOW TO PROMOTE PERFECT TIMING AND OPPORTUNE MOMENTS TO WORK IN YOUR FAVOR?

I proposed an answer to this question, under the following criteria:

Face the fears that change may bring

In the book of **Matthew chapter 25 verses 14-28**, we read an interesting story about challenging changes that were opportunities for improvement. The passage reads:

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a

hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master', he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master', he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master', he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathered where you have not scattered seed. So, I was afraid and went out and

hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you'.

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So, you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest'.

So, take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags."

Matthew 25:14-28

The man who was given one bag of gold allowed his fears to take over and became prejudiced. In the end, he perceived as a problem, what should have been a great opportunity.

Like him, there are many people unable to understand their life circumstances. People that—under fear—perceive something good as bad and distort what should be a blessing or an opportunity.

This story told by Jesus Christ does not have to do with behavioral tests or performance results, but with **CHANGES, AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT.** Fear gave

an opposed perspective to one of the main characters in this story!

This reminds me of a portion of the scriptures in Proverbs 29:25 about how "fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Here we find a couple of words from the original Hebrew worth mentioning. One is the word "*kjaradá*" translated as fear, anxiety, panic, consternation; the other one is "*natán*" that translates as an attack, bring on, relapse, retaliation, trap.

Fear in an individual is not a matter of little importance. It is a stressing factor that generates anxiety, panic, and even a state of consternation. Fear is unhealthy!

And how does fear affect a person? It attacks, brings on affliction and bad rewards, puts a price on a person's peace of mind, it brings a person down emotionally and creates a desire for revenge on the person that suffers it; in general, it is a snare or trap. Like I said, fear is not a matter of little importance when in the heart and mind of a person!

Going back to the passage we read in Matthew, we can say by way of summary: A possible change for the better resulted in total failure because of fear.

It is not in God's plan that men fail. God's wish is that we take life changes as opportunities to improve ourselves, regardless of the challenge they represent. In the story we read, the purpose of the master was that his servants improved and moved on to better positions and also that they shared in his happiness which was equivalent to entering a state of plenty and fulfillment. That is what the invitation expresses: *Come and share your master's happiness!*

Identify the threats and insecurities that change may bring

In the book of **Luke chapter 15 verses 11-14**, we read about A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER that ended up badly for one of the main characters in the story, the Parable of the Lost Son. It reads:

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them". Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need."

Luke 15:11-14

This was a change for the better that resulted in a disaster for the younger son.

However, it is interesting to see how the story told by Jesus develops. Total failure activated a process of restoration. After the younger son began to be in need, he reconsidered his situation and realized that he could revert his circumstances through repentance, application of lessons learned, and correct decision making. So, he returned home, where his father welcomed him with open arms and even threw a party in his honor.

However, the restoration phase activated by the younger son also activated a seemingly potential threat for the older one. He felt bad for the fine welcome offered by his father for his younger brother upon returning home and unleashed his accumulated frustrations. Always visualize the importance and validity of every threat in your life and evaluate its possible origin, as well as its legitimacy.

Some people complicate what should be simple, create adversity where there is none, and see controversy where there is only opportunity. That is just what happened with the older son in this story. He was getting himself entangled in a situation that could have been full of opportunity and completion. However, usually the person who adopts this

erroneous attitude can hardly ever reason back in the right direction.

Identifying the threats and insecurities brought on by change and life challenges is of vital importance when correctly responding to life. It requires careful examination of each situation to avoid dealing with threats and insecurities that only exist in our minds; it is crucial to separate fiction from reality.

Do not get tangled up in conjectures

To conjecture or to guess is to base your ideas, arguments, and conclusions on speculation and suspicion. It also means to define something as being truthful based on personal feelings and opinions and not based on facts and specific issues.

A clear example is found in the book of ***John chapter 11:32:***

"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Living your life based on "If this had been and not that" or "if this had happened and not the other" is to get tangled up in conjectures. An attitude like this creates a heavier burden to

carry and it may even close your path indefinitely.

We move in a world of possibilities and our job is to choose and decide what is best to do; once you have made a decision you cannot stop and continuously bite your fingernails nervously guessing what could have been or could have happened had you chosen a different direction. That is no way to live! We might become victims of doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity. You make a decision and that's it! You must face the consequences!

Guesswork reduces a person's potential — weakens faith regarding oneself— and at the same time, blurs opportunities. This is a form of self-sabotage, becoming your own enemy, weakening your potential, capabilities, and talents. And as if that wasn't enough, ruining your opportunities.

It is best if you define your situation as bad and start looking for possible solutions, and adopt an attitude of faith and resolution instead of getting trapped in what could have been or what could have happened.

Regarding this way of living defined by “what could have been” it is valid to say that there are two better anchorages available: life must be taken as it presents itself and we must live it

based on what happened and not on what could have happened.

Dear friend, get out of your head those speculating ideas that consume your strength! Nothing good results from those thoughts; they only sink you in a state of fatality when facing your life and your destiny.

Changes and challenges from the present must not compete against those from the past

This statement will help you stay focused all the time. On the contrary, if you live in an eternal competition between yesterday and today — before versus after— you will not achieve anything but fatigue and exhaustion. Besides, living in a world of comparisons prevents adjusting to the present with its present changes and challenges.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 7 verse 10 we read: “Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these? For it is not wise to ask such questions.”

The word of God is quite clear about creating competition between the things that belong to the past versus the things that belong to the present.

It is best to concentrate on the present! Concentrate on facing your future. Having

learned from the past what is necessary, focus with an optimistic, practical, and balanced attitude on the present day, and that will provide a perfect bridge into the future.

This will promote perfect timing and opportune moments to work in your favor —as read in the book of Ecclesiastes—.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT PAUL KNEW ABOUT THE WORST TIMES AND THE BEST TIMES

There is a valuable portion in the scriptures—in one of the letters written by Paul—where we can find clues to make the worst times into the best times. In **2 Corinthians 4:13-18**, we read:

"It is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we

fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Extraordinary! Let me explain why.

Paul knew that believing the right thing motivates you to speak the right thing, and that changes the worst times into the best times

Regardless of what's happening around us, our faith and convictions are revealed when we speak. That being the gear to start the turnaround of bad scenarios into scenarios of blessings.

The expression "*I believed; therefore, I have spoken*" used by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians was based on the verses written in the book of ***Psalms 116***:

"For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I trusted in the Lord when I said, "I am greatly afflicted";

Psalms 116:8-10

In another version of the Bible, the New King James Version, we read it in a simpler and more compressed version: "*I believed; therefore, I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted"*". This is an example of the correct attitude to adopt under difficult circumstances. Something is for sure, you can be facing the worst situations, but if you start speaking the right things, powerful things will be liberated in your favor and you will move from being defenseless and weak to being safe and strong.

It is an inexorable law. Your words reveal what you believe. If you believe that you are good for nothing, that is what you will speak; if you believe that God has abandoned you, that is exactly what you will say with your own words; if you believe that God can lift you from ruin, that is what your words will confess. It is inevitable, words will express what's in the human heart.

While serving as a spiritual counselor, I realized, that people who come for advice will reveal their real situation in the first few minutes of conversation. A pastor just needs to listen. Therefore, people must analyze the way they speak because if what they speak is bad, everything else will be worse. However, if they dare to believe that God can reach them with goodness, it will show in the words they speak.

And let's not forget something crucial: words create the spiritual environment and the setting for what happens in our life history.

Paul knew that adversity reveals not only the weaknesses in human beings, but also reveals the glory of God, and that changes the worst times into the best times

Paul connects this passage with the glory of God. As a general rule, human beings hardly ever think that what is happening to them has to do with the glory of God.

There are so many passages in the Bible where we can see fear, heartache, and anxiety in action to later witness how all the drama was just connecting the biblical characters with the glory of God.

That is why when in adversity, the first question we must ask ourselves is: am I seeing the glory of God in what is happening to me? Is this trial I am going through for the glory of God?

Think about Job and his words:
*"And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh, I will see God.
Job 19:26*

What is Job saying? That after tragedy and turmoil, the glory of God will be awaiting him and that gives him hope in a scenario of bad times. The unique expectation that we will see the glory of God is so powerful as to lift the weakest and fallen and provide strength to the needy. Do you realize how these important clues help you revert negative situations that accompany the worst of times?

Paul was sure of the final victory, and that changes the worst times into the best times

Paul is telling us that he knew the content of the final chapter in advance! He states with an energetic voice and iron conviction: *"because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us..."*

This statement is something powerful; it has to do with knowing (not feeling, but conviction) that there is always an ulterior purpose in every trial and tribulation. Paul is convinced that God does not exempt us from difficulties, but guarantees a process, which I will refer to as a "process of resurrection", for everything that we see dying around us. I am not talking about just physical death, but everything alive and vital in our lives that suffer decay and die. God has a miracle and a "resurrection experience" for

everything around us that is ruined, destroyed, spoiled, or dies. Paul knows this process which is precisely why he tells us that “God will raise us in the last chapter”.

On my part, I am convinced that this “resurrection experience” does not only comprehend the eternal dimension of our bodies, but also the dimension of the power of Christ, capable of bringing back to life everything that we saw get lost or die in our earthly circumstances.

I am saying that the phrase “He will also raise us” is a powerful truth applicable to all chapters in the life of a Christian.

Paul knew that God would be glorified in everything, and that changes the worst times into the best times

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul declares that all struggles and trials are not in vain, but that all things work together for the glory of God!

Behind this belief and affirmation are the revelation and the knowledge that the divine sovereign God controls everything that happens to us.

This conviction was precisely what helped me through the hard-ministerial battles I fought in the past, and even after serious confrontations

that included threats, I held on tight to the idea that God controls all the things that happen to us. That conviction drove me to tell my adversaries: "You are only going to be able to do to me what God allows you to do". With that idea in my mind, God was able to take me from that difficult ecclesial conflict to a land of abundance! — using the words of the psalmist.

That is why I want to encourage you and assure you that when you feel weak, or when you feel defeated and miserable, God is in control. And no matter how bad you feel, you must dare to believe that your struggles and trials are not in vain, because the loving God that is with you and accompanies you all the time, has everything under the control of his sovereign will defined by Paul as "good, pleasing and perfect will".

Paul knew that trials produce interior renovation, and that changes the worst times into the best times

With a voice full of experience, Paul writes to the Corinthians: "*Though outwardly we are wasting away...*" This word "wasting away", is translated into English from the Greek word "*diapseiro*" which means decompose, ruin, waste. Every day, we are witnesses to this process of wear

and tear in the things we love, including significant relations. This process seems to be part of life itself and part of the human experience.

Paul adds to this statement that regardless of the process of outwardly wasting away, we are "*inwardly being renewed day by day*". This word renewed originates from the Greek "*anakainóo*". "*Anakainóo*" originates from the term "*anakainósis*", which indicates a process of renovation; this term means that internal renovation is never the result of a one-time experience during a crisis or the result of just one single act.

We should never expect the internal renovation to happen as a result of a one-time miracle; neither by one laying-on of hands or one prophetic word, but through a complete life process.

"*Anakainósis*" is a compound word made up of two parts "*aná*" which means through, and "*kainós*" which means a new thing, not seen before, something that has never existed. There is a difference between the Greek word "*neos*" which means new, and "*kainós*" which means new in the sense that it did not exist before.

To explain further, we can illustrate the meaning of "*anakainóo*" as an experience of internal renovation by making the following

comparison: If you buy a shirt in a store, in a sense it is new, no one has worn it before, it may even be in its original package as all new things should be; but, even though the shirt is new, the store is full of shirts exactly like yours, same color, design, fabric, same buttons, etc. Your shirt is "*neos*", but it is not "*kainós*".

The process we refer to as "*anakainósis*" that God performs in our lives, is different from any other kind of process in a normal human life scope. It renews the human being from within, creating something never seen before, new in design and pattern. As someone once said: "When God created you, He threw away the mold to the bottom of the sea". That means that what God makes within each one of us is unique.

Paul knew that trials have an expiration date, and that changes the worst times into the best times

Paul refers to adversity in his letter to the Corinthians as "*our light and momentary troubles*". In other versions of the Bible, we read: "*for our light affliction, which is but for a moment...*" This brief but substantial content tells us that tribulation has an expiration date. This information is something that should bring us comfort especially during those times in our

lives when we feel that adversity will last forever.

Trials do not last forever! Trials have an ending point! Keep this in mind until your anguish is subdued and brought before God in obedience to His word.

Do you understand the spiritual potential that God has placed in your hands, such being that you know that trials will not last longer than they should? This message can only be summarized in two words: Have hope!

Paul knew that trials work in our favor instead of against us, and that changes the worst times into the best times

This fact is great! And so, we come to realize how our faith in Jesus Christ and His word brings a new life perspective for us.

Paul tells us: These "*light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory...*" There is something else besides pain, frustration, and affliction as a result of trials. There is something intrinsically intimate, personal, and good that results from the trials we go through in life. Trials work in our favor instead of against us!

The word "*achieve*" originates from the Greek word "*katergázomai*" which can be translated as work completed (by implication, to

finish, to complete the labor). This translation indicates, that God will not leave unfinished, the work He has started in us. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: *“being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 1:6)

Do not let yourself be overwhelmed or depressed by the difficulties you encounter in times of trial. Repeat to yourself over and over that trials work in your favor and not against you.

Paul knew that what is not seen is more real than what is seen, and that changes the worst times into the best times

Paul, with all honesty and convincingly states: Things which can be seen are temporary and things which cannot be seen are permanent. A good thing about the Lord, as author and offeror of this promise, is that He is not elected every four years -like politicians in my country-. He is in His throne forever!

Without a doubt, the phrase “Things which can be seen are transient, but things which cannot be seen are eternal”, is more than spiritual lyrics. It indicates the real nature of things: what is not seen, the spiritual things, are the backdrop or the

originating factor for everything which is seen, the material things. This information goes in line with the passage in the book of Hebrews, which states: "*Things we see were made from what could not be seen*", speaking about everything that exists (Hebrews 11:3 NLV).

Do not be overly impressed by the "*things we see*" and don't be discouraged by difficult scenarios in your present life. Trust in God and take strength in His word to declare that you do not depend on what you see, but on what you don't see, which are things even more real than those which can be seen; because spiritual things which cannot be seen are the reason and origin of all things which can be seen.

So, I ask: at the end of the day, what things are trustworthy? Things which can be seen - temporary things- as stated in the Bible, or things which cannot be seen- meaning eternal things?

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORST TIMES INTO THE BEST TIMES?

There is an example in the Bible of someone that, with his attitudes and dependence on God, achieved changing the worst times into the best times. That someone is Joseph. The book of **Genesis** tells us about him:

"The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was a famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt, there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe everywhere."
Genesis 41:53-57

Those were certainly bad times. This passage is similar —in conditions— to what prevails today in the world: hunger, unemployment, and insecurity all around. The real question is: Is there a leader or someone capable enough to solve the big problems that afflict the entire human race? This is a serious question asked in countries around the planet, regardless of their level of growth and development. Facing the challenge of providing water, food, and employment, all nations, big or small, deal with those demands almost with the same intensity. The same thing happened in the times of Joseph.

What kind of principles or wisdom did Joseph need to reverse poverty, lack of prosperity, uncertainty about a future scenario with total stability? We'll talk about that in this chapter.

The first word of advice...

Put your faith on the subject and not the object

Hebrews 12:2 reads: "*Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of faith.*" This passage tells us to put and concentrate our eyes on the subject; in our case we are referring to Jesus Christ.

What we just read in the Bible can be paraphrased by saying that it is all about

translating our faith from the benefit to the benefactor, from the promise to the author of the promise, from the object to the subject.

How many people, however, do just the opposite? Too many, I would say.

Let us examine a critical example in the Bible. **Luke 15:29-31**, complemented with verse **11**, and then followed by verses **12 and 13**. Let's see what these portions of the scripture tell us.

"But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'" *"My son," the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* **verses 29-31**

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons..." **verse 11.**

"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

*"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living..." **verses 12-13.***

Let's make some considerations about the passages read.

As a common denominator, all three passages reveal the main concern of the principal characters in the story, even though each is shown differently.

First, the older son, when complaining to his father shows us what is important to him: the material things. It is just as Jesus pointed out when He said: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". For the older son, the most important thing was that he did not receive what he considered he should have received. And so, he expressed his anger.

Second, the father, at the beginning of the story is only mentioned as "a man who had two sons". For this father his most precious possessions were not material things, but his two sons and his relationship with them. How frustrating must be to find out that your worth is

only because of what you have to offer regarding material matters?

Third, the younger son, the same as the older one, declares that what is important to him is the money; and once he obtained his inheritance, he no longer had a reason to stay close to the house of his father.

These passages together speak to us strongly about the problem of many: They have their eyes set on the gift not the giver of the gift! And as an aggravating factor, we must recognize that we apply this attitude to God. We need God for what He can give us rather than for who He is. This reality makes Christianity as practiced by some people, false, to a certain extent.

Do not let the system of this world change your identity and values

We just read and commented on a passage of the Bible, where we can see how a change of values affected the identity of the people involved. Something that we should never allow to happen to us.

On the same subject, we read in ***Daniel 1:6-7*** about a struggle between the value system of this world, and the value system of the children of God; its main purpose is to change the

identity we have as Christians. Let's review this portion of the scripture.

"Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego."

Daniel 1:6-7

The story is about the Israelites belonging to the nobility that were taken captive to imperial Babylon, among whom were three young men taken to be trained in the service of the king because of their aptitudes, qualities, and lineage.

The most interesting part —seemingly lacking importance—, is that the first action taken by the chief officer, whose charge they were under, was to change their names; in a way to make them appear less like Israelites and more like belonging to the Babylonian culture.

Is this changing of their names important? Is it simply done due to cultural reasoning?

Let us examine this closer and conclude, that definitely, the name changing has a connotation that goes beyond cultural reasoning but it's

spiritual and transmutation of values and identities.

The name Daniel means "God is my judge" changed to Belteshazzar, which means "Baal protects my life". The name Hananiah means "God is merciful" changed to Shadrach, which means "may the author of evil be auspicious". The name Mishael which means "Coming from God" changed to Meshach, which means "Belonging to Sesac" (a Chaldean god), and the name Azariah meaning "Helped by God" changed to Abednego, meaning "servant of Nego (another Chaldean god).

It is not a simple change of names; its intention is to change their identity and values! It is not from a cultural point of view but a spiritual one. But from that moment on, these young men began to resist this process of change of identity and values, to the extent that even the special diet with which they were supposed to be fed was discarded by them. In other words, they knew that these changes were truly demonic and malefic and that if they accepted them, it would leave an indelible mark in their spiritual life.

In your case and situation, I ask: Can it be possible that inadvertently and maybe in a subtle way, you are allowing changes to take place in your spiritual identity and values? It

may be in the business and financial areas of your life? Or with something that relates to your social relations or your sexual life? Perhaps in the order of your priorities at the place given to God?

Thinking about this is worthwhile.... Not only thinking about it but seriously examining and facing whatever we find to avoid being transformed into evil without even being aware.

Concentrate your faith in what you expect to have, and not in what you already have

Hebrews 11:1 reads:

"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

What this verse is saying is that if you are waiting for something but still not see it, it is faith. Contrary to that, if you already have it and you are enjoying it, then it is something else but faith.

In other words, we can say that faith is something that is expected in the future. It is faith only if you are waiting for it to be or to happen. But if it is something of the present, it cannot be considered as faith; if you already have it, you cannot apply faith to it.

Let's keep reasoning. Some have stopped having biblical faith —confidence in what we hope for— and have fallen into something similar to idolatry: having faith in what you have.

For example: If you prayed for a job and God gave you a job, while you were praying, you were in an attitude of faith. But once you have the job, it would be wrong to put your faith in that job saying: — “Nobody is going to take my job away”; “I hope I don't lose my job”. — Can you see the difference? to have faith in what you already have is not faith. If you have something then you must be thankful to God and trust that He will keep safe your provision or your job because you don't depend on the job, but on God who provided it. I insist, putting your faith in what you have is an action closer to paganism and idolatry than it is to faith.

So, I ask you: How many things in your possession or great achievements in your life have become your “object of faith”? Many people are into the idolatry of a wish fulfilled like: a job, a relationship, a completed project, etc. Be careful! Because just like God gave it to you as a wish fulfilled, He can take it back, just like He did with Abraham regarding his son Isaac.

God gave Isaac to Abraham as a promise kept. While Abraham waited for God's promise he was in an attitude of faith, confident in what

he hoped for. But once Isaac was born as the fulfillment of that promise, God tested Abraham to see if he had his faith in God or his faith in what God had given him.

CHAPTER 4

GROWTH PRINCIPLES FOR TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

There is nothing that cannot be reversed. While we are living on this side of eternity, it is always possible to experience positive changes and escape distressing circumstances to move forward to better times.

Changing circumstances in the middle of times of uncertainty involves divine principles — principles of the word of God—. That is why it is so important to distance ourselves from false sources —or broken cisterns that cannot hold water— and turn to God with all our hearts, as our maximum source of blessing and well-being.

In ***Psalms 81:8-16***, there is advice about turning back to God and listening to Him to reach prosperity in life.

*"Hear me, my people, and I will warn you— if you would only listen to me, Israel! You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not worship any god other than me. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.
"But my people would not listen to me;*

Israel would not submit to me. So, I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. "If my people would only listen to me if Israel would only follow my ways, how quickly I would subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Psalms 81:8-16

There is not much to comment before such an eloquent claim from God against a human race that does not listen to His voice, but looks for strange sources to attach to for dependency.

The prophet Jeremiah makes the same claim when he writes:

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Jeremiah 2:13

The best we can do —and the biggest favor we can do for ourselves—, is to find and apply

those principles from the word of God that can take us to prosperity from His hand.

What principles from the Bible can we cite to help us in times of uncertainty?

Discover the potential and the possibilities in the things underestimated by others

1 Kings 18:43-44 offers us a powerful principle:

"—Go and look toward the sea— he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand..."

1 Kings 18:43-44

Please note that the keyword in these short verses is "look". This four-letter word is referring to something extremely important for human beings, our perceptual ability.

When Jesus Christ speaks of seeing and interpreting correctly what surrounds us, He states in a sentencing tone: *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is*

darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)

Going back to the passage in 1 Kings 18:43-44, please note how the word "look", and the phrase "go and look" are reiterated and insisted upon by Elijah. "Go", "look", "he looked", "I cannot see anything", "go and look"; all these words and phrases underline the importance of something that we usually do carelessly, and that is, interpreting what we see.

During spiritual counseling, a person's ability to interpret his or her situation correctly moves them forward at least fifty percent when solving life problems, conflicts, or crisis. If the person can "read correctly" what is happening, he or she is closer to a solution; but if that person cannot interpret events and experiences, then that person's capacity to solving problems is blocked.

Interestingly enough, it took the servant of prophet Elijah seven tries to interpret something that was about to happen. He had to come and go, as required by the prophet, who insisted that his servant had not captured what he had to see. And then, the servant managed to pay closer attention and saw something that had been there all the time: *"a cloud as small as a man's hand..."*

How many times have you backed off from something that had great potential because you did not capture it well the first time you saw it? How many opportunities, small as a man's hand, did you discard because you thought them unimportant! How many great things did you dismiss because you underestimated, undervalued, belittled each one?

Experts are clear that success has to do with perseverance and with being able to see what others overlooked rather than having outstanding capabilities over everyone else.

However, the answer given by the servant of prophet Elijah deserves a complete analysis: *"Behold, a little cloud like the palm of a man's hand arises out of the sea"*. (JUB version) In the original Hebrew, the words used are "jinné" (behold!), "catón" (a little), "ab" (cloud, thickness, wrapper), and "kaf" (hand). In a basic interpretation, one could say in plain English: "Look, a small wrapper the size of the palm of a hand!"

What is the text telling us? It is saying that so many times we discard wonderful opportunities because we underestimate "the wrapper" in which they are presented. We discard opportunities that come from heaven to receive great blessings just because our eye is in darkness, and we don't perceive anything

beyond the wrapper (or situation) in which God's provision presents itself.

My advice is to start looking at opportunities more carefully. This action will require, just like the case of the servant of prophet Elijah, to look repeatedly at the same item. If it takes seven times, well then, you must do it! You must not ignore that the difference between Elijah's certainty about what was coming, and the times it took his servant to discover it, was prayer. Before giving instructions to his servant to go and look in the direction of the sea, Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bent down to the ground, and put his face between his knees. (verse 42).

Practice the powerful action of blessing your future

A passage from the scriptures that focuses on this practice is **Hebrews 11:20-22**.

"By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. (concerning things to come. NKJV). By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from

Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

Hebrews 11:20-22

Before us, there is a picture of people moving ahead of their own time and history and proclaiming, literally, words of blessing about things to come. That shows how the spiritual world can be altered to make things that should happen, come to be.

Jesus Christ said on one occasion:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Matthew 18:18

Let's give these words its correct dimension. "*Blessing things to come*", originates from the use of two Greek joints or articulations in the original texts: "*euloguéo*" (speak well, bless), and "*mélo*" (about to happen, probability). This text indicates that you can bless something that is only a probability or something on the horizon of time and circumstances. Doing so creates an effect of blessing over those events.

Something else worth noticing in the passage read in Hebrews 11 is that future generations were blessed. In one case the blessing was

directed to the sons and in the other to the grandsons. These actions open an opportunity to make —read carefully what I am saying— modifications in the course of events. Instead of just settling for whatever happens, let's seek to venture into the spiritual world —from which we already said originate all material things—; and let us bound in heaven or loose on earth, so that in the spiritual world and heaven, things become reversed, insured and even transformed.

The last thing that can be read in this passage in Hebrews 11 is that, based on what we pray for, important decisions are made. In the case of Joseph, following the same context about blessing things to come, he gave instructions about his mortal remains feeling assured that things would happen just as he was anticipating.

These biblical characters are not in the present human history scenario anymore, but you and I remain to emulate their example and behavior and adopt the powerful practice of blessing the future.

I want to ask you: When was the last time you prayed for the future of your children? Can it be that you have never prayed for your future and that of your family? Can it be that you never practiced bounding in heaven and loosening on

earth to affect with this type of prayers what is coming in your horizon?

To what extent –do you think– is it possible to alter future events? To what extent is it possible to modify situations and circumstances through prayer? Let us consider another passage from the Bible regarding the following:

Provoke relief in adverse circumstances, through prayer

Jesus, when speaking with His disciples about the events which were to happen in the days previous to His second coming, gave them this advice: *"Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath..."* (Matthew 24:20). The Peshitta Bible (Aramaic version of the Bible) states in this same verse: *"Pray that your flight will not take place on stormy weather..."*

This verse from the Scriptures reinforces that it is possible to exercise modifications to events and circumstances in specific moments of history; all through prayer.

We could just "let anything happen to us" ... Or, we could modify what is going to happen! And that simple word from Jesus is nothing more than a clear invitation to break away from evils that are in our way making our path difficult. Evils like conformism, passivity, and fatalism are

attitudes that bound the circumstances in which our history takes place.

In other words: instead of living with our arms crossed in a passive and conformist attitude, proclaim compelling prayers for your future, to obtain preventive medicine and relief from conflicting conditions waiting for you. I insist we could just "let anything happen to us"... or we could modify what is going to happen!

Make loans to God

How? Is it possible for me to make loans to God? Of course, it is possible! Let me explain how to do it. GIVE TO THOSE WHO HAVE LESS THAN YOU.

The Bible, in the book of Proverbs, states clearly and literally: "*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done.*"

Extraordinary! Who could have imagined that what we do for others less favored than us is taken as a loan to God himself! Only the Bible can give us such clues on how to unbound blessings and prosperity over our life scenario. There is no other source in which we can find real clues regarding ways to make blessings come our way.

Something we must speak out loud is this: God pays his loans. He gives us His word in the Bible and tells us that He will reward those who have been kind to the poor. This promise is a strong reason to be generous, show solidarity, and become benefactors of the needy because it will come back to us.

One more way to see it is that God asks us to be His representatives and temporarily give to others of the resources available to us, which will be paid back by the God whom we represent when doing such actions. Don't ever doubt that God will pay back those loans with interest!

Make sure you understand the difference between peace from this world and peace from God

Peace from this world is based on facts, prevailing conditions, and circumstances that must be profiled positively so people can say they have peace. Peace from God, on the contrary, does not circumscribe to what is happening in the world. The concept is this: Peace, not because of the absence of conflict, but despite of it.

Jesus Christ made it clear when He said:
"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world

*gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not be afraid”*

John 14:27

It is clear, in the words of Jesus Christ, that there are two types of peace: Peace as given by the world —based strictly on what happens in this world—, and the peace given by God — which is opposite and different from the first one—. The peace that originates from His being, as a source of peace and tranquility.

Decide not to depend on what is happening around you, and learn to see the difference between circumstantial peace according to the conditions of this world, and peace that comes from God.

The peace that comes from God —as stated by Apostle Paul— transcends all understanding and all rationality. It is the kind of peace that is based, not in facts, not in forecasts, but on promises. By looking at life from this perspective, our understanding and approach to our present and future changes.

Think of yourself as a friend of God

Think of yourself as a friend of God, not like a victim of adversity, forgotten, and forsaken.

I like this passage from the Bible, where Jesus tells his disciples:

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you."

John 15:15

The proof that friendship existed between Jesus and His disciples was that He shared with them what He heard from the Father. This action is similar to having the freedom to share our private stories with our friends; or about giving someone the privilege to know things that we keep reserved from everyone else. The wonderful thing is that we can apply those words, pronounced by Jesus, to our lives and count ourselves as friends of the Father, Creator, Owner, and solver of all things.

These are interesting terms used by Jesus! He speaks of servants and friends. In the original Greek, the word "*doúlos*" which is used to refer to servants and it translates as "subjection, subordination". And the word "*filos*" which is used to refer to friends and it translates as "dear, friend, partner".

So, let's not argue against this. We can see ourselves as friends of God. And what is great about this is that it changes the outlook and the course of our lives. Why? Because as friends of God, we feel accompanied by the one who has the power and control over all things. And that takes us away from the pathetic scenario where some find themselves feeling alone and abandoned.

A portion of the scripture where we can clearly see what I am saying is the story found in **John 5:3-7**:

"Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

John 5:3-7

Here we can observe clear indicators and certain symptomatology in the way this man speaks that denotes a condition of orphanhood,

of abandonment, and of feeling unarmed and helpless. He was physically sick in a state of paralysis for more than thirty-eight years. But the worst part of his situation was not his disability in the physical sense but in the emotional and spiritual sense observed in his expressions: "*I have no one*" and "*someone else goes down ahead of me*".

Life is full of people that, just like this man of the story, have lost all hope and cannot believe or even imagine that their situation could change for the better. These are people that position themselves as victims of life itself, and believe themselves at a total disadvantage.

The man of the story seems not to notice two things. First, the opportunity presented by Jesus "*Do you want to get well?*" Second, the possibility to lose the chance of a lifetime. How and why? Because he has allowed himself to be possessed by a feeling of abandonment.

I insist that there are people like that and they are not few. People invaded by feelings of failure and procrastination to the point that even having a big opportunity in front of their faces, they no longer see a way out of their painful circumstances, they no longer believe in something new, redeeming, and different. Don't let that happen to you.

CHAPTER 5

TURNING BAD TIMES INTO GOOD TIMES

I want to start this part of the book with the passage found in Psalms 84:5-7: "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs...*"

The New King James Version states: "*...as they pass through the Valley of Weeping, they make it a spring; ...*"

The original Hebrew text would read, "*...turning the BAKÁ into BERAKÁ*". What do these two Greek words mean? Well, "*baká*" means cry, lament, grief; and "*beraká*" means fountain, blessing, gift; by implication: prosperity.

And what does all of this mean? It means that in many cases, human experience is like a valley of weeping, lament, and loss, things that all of us have experienced in more than one occasion in our lives; but going in the opposite direction can, with the power of God, turn the valley of weeping into a fountain. Please note that the text reads "*they make it*". Who? Men

and women that have their strength in God and walk in the path of the Lord!

The big question is how do they do it? How can they turn valleys of weeping into springs? Let's go in search of the answer.

Dare to plan for the future despite the crisis

The passage **Jeremiah 29:4-7** is a clear and strong invitation from God to plan in the middle of the crisis and despite of it.

"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

To this word, he adds what many Christians have appropriated for themselves, amid life's uncertainties:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I will explain the historical, social, economic, and spiritual context of this passage. The time was a post-war crisis. They had been invaded and conquered by a superior enemy power, and everything basic was lacking: water, food, safe homes. There was no peace, and chaos and insecurity were all around.

The royal family had been arrested and all those who could be of use to Babylon such as craftsmen, goldsmiths, men with education, lineage families, etc. had been taken into forced exile to convert them into a group of specialized labor and service.

What about those who stayed behind in Jerusalem? Those had no better luck. On the contrary, they suffered the hecatomb that came with the destruction of the holy city Jerusalem — the city of God.

Amidst the chaos, voices were adding to the confusion, voices that predicted that it would be

a crisis of short duration. Oh, how wrong they were, for the crisis lasted for seventy years!

In such a context —of high dramatic content, and an environment of loss, failure, fears, and uncertainty where all hope in the future seems to have vanished— God gave strict instructions to His people, to not be paralyzed by what was happening, to not be persuaded by what they saw, but to be brave and make plans for the present and the future.

What are these specific instructions given by God?

Let's start to count them one by one. He tells them to adapt to their new prevailing conditions, but that those same conditions —apparently working against them— will bring new and big opportunities. Adapting to what is happening is part of the strategy of God for our victory.

He urges them to work for the prosperity of their new life scenario and to work for the welfare of the city where they have been taken because if the city prospers so would they. Extraordinary!

He adds that they must not get stuck in a vision or feel pessimistic about life. They must not get overwhelmed by their surroundings or whatever is happening at the moment.

Finally, He tells them to make plans, to build houses and live in them, to plant and eat from

the fruit harvested, to marry, and to have children and grandchildren.

And if that wasn't enough, He tells them to increase in numbers and not decrease.

A promise on which to base our plans

All instructions are —as it usually is with the word of God— a contradiction to life events and bad forecasts because they rest on the solid rock that is the promise of the Lord:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

With a promise like this, all bad forecasts can be contradicted and plans for a better future can be made.

"For I know the plans I have for you." It is worth our while to analyze carefully all that is implicit in this one word: *"plans"*.

The Hebrew word used in the original version is *"makjashébet"*, with a large variety of meanings that increase the richness, dimension, and power of this promise. *"Makjashébet"* has the following potential translations:

Invention: This word relates to discovering something new or not known. This word tells us

that God is in charge of creating things that you and I have not seen yet to bless us and bring prosperity in the worst scenarios and situations.

It seems to have a connection with something Paul expressed: "*What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived*"— *are the things God has prepared for those who love him.*" In other words, God will be a creative inventor of things no human mind has conceived. His main objective is our well-being.

Device. The word "*makjashébet*", can also be translated as a device. And what is a device? It is a mechanism needed to act. What is this word indicating? It indicates that just as you can turn the light on and off in a room with a device button, so can God use any device to solve our battles, conflicts, and needs.

This very minute there are divine devices that you cannot see, being prepared for you; devices that will solve problems, actual situations, and things you don't even know will happen to you in the future. And those devices are being prepared beforehand for you and me, just like they were prepared for the people of God in those past periods of crisis.

Machinery. An assemblage of mechanical apparatuses. This means that God will use all possible machinery —all the apparatuses combined—, to make that promise come true in our lives. This is not a poetic language, but a technical language; it speaks of machinery that God will make available for you, while you are in your path, to free you from your enemies and lift you to a state of welfare and victory.

Design. Another translation of the word "*makjashébet*". We know that a design has to do with an original conception and blueprints. This is exactly what God is offering! With this word, He reminds us that He is a God that makes plans, designs, and blueprints. He is not a God that improvises, but one that, before we saw the light of day when we were born, had already designed and included us in His plans.

Psalms 139:13-16 reads:

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous —how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You

saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed."

Plan. Yet another translation of the Hebrew word "*makjashébet*". A plan is an idea or purpose carried out from your own will. God has made plans for you based on His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Ingenious work. That is nothing else but the highest expression of creativity. In this case, divine creativity in your favor and for your blessing. And without forgetting that the word engineering is related to ingenuity, we can say that God will do ingenious work and wonderful engineering to make His plans for you prosper.

None of this is of little importance! And even so, the passage indicates that this "*makjashébet*" is for peace. And peace translates to Hebrew as "*shalóm*", which means happiness, health, completeness, peace, and prosperity.

Would there be something else that you would need beyond the "*shalom makjashébet*" of God? I doubt it very much.

We should use this scripture and this divine promise as a base when making plans,

regardless of what is happening around us. Don't you agree?

In addition, let us study a biblical example of yet another difficult period: the time of Moses.

In the book of **Exodus**, we find an excellent story about the subject. In these passages, the phrase "I will make a distinction" is used to refer to the people of God.

"But on that day, I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow."

"But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die."

"...hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields—both people and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were."

"So, Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived."

Exodus 8:22-23, 9:4,24-26 and 10:22-23

Greater eloquence is impossible! It is clearly written in the word of God, that He will fulfill everything He has promised us, His people. I even dare say that what we have read in the Bible is exactly what will happen in these times of world crisis with the children of God.

Elements of a planning process

Quickly I want to add what I consider the most vital element in any planning process. With what purpose? To ensure that you come to comprehend that planning in a time of crisis is not just an emotion or a spiritual feeling but something you must put to work with concrete actions.

If you are going to plan based on God's promises, that means that you cannot just sit and wait for something to happen. You have to create situations and scenarios to let God do His part, while you do precisely yours.

The elements to achieve a good planning process are the following:

1. Clearly define your goal.

Determine a specific course of action to arrive at your final destination.

2. Organize your assets.

Take an inventory of your assets. People usually want to reach their goals without committing the resources at hand with discipline, because sometimes, they are not aware of what they have.

3. Find the people who can support you and the role they play in your plan.

People around you are always one of the main resources you have. When you are surrounded by the right kind of people, you can generate the means and opportunities to achieve all your potential.

4. Define the things your plan requires you to do or to stop doing.

All visions and plans have a double requirement: things that you must stop doing, and this requires discipline; and things that you have to do, and this requires commitment.

5. Overcome the fear of failure.

All of us have things that work against us, but we also have things that work in our favor. When God called Abraham, he was seventy-five years old; the forecast of age seemed to work against him, but despite that, he faced his calling... and he lived an additional one hundred years! He died when he was one hundred and seventy-five years old!

6. Establish time limits.

By this phrase I mean measurable actions in a timeline. We already read that "*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens*"; this requires precision and discipline regarding the timing of each activity. In other words, you cannot live your life like you have all the time in the world to achieve today's goals.

7. Supervise, analyze, and adjust.

Be on top of your business, analyze your efforts versus results, and make any changes needed when necessary.

With these elements of the planning process—without leaving out the spiritual component which is the most important one—, you can

stage and act on everything you believe and expect from the Lord.

I will finish by reminding you that you move based on promises and not forecasts and the promises of God are a total contradiction, not only to forecasts, but to all human events. Regarding the natural sense of things, life may not present itself as having a flattering outlook, but regarding the spiritual sense, you can foresee great potential because of what God has spoken about you and for you.

Choose to always fill your heart with "the best things"

The things that fill our hearts are not God's responsibility but our own. In other words, it is our unavoidable and individual responsibility to watch the things we allow to enter our hearts.

In ***Philippians 4:4-9***, we read:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters,

whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable —if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:4-9

Paul is telling us how to keep our hearts full of the elements and proper components needed for spiritual, mental and, emotional health. In other words, Paul gives us advice about our health and integral hygiene.

This is exactly where my advice also comes in. Choose the best elements to fill your heart with. If not, you are working against your peace and tranquility.

The Following is a good example:

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, “Lord, don’t you

care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"
"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered,
"you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

The passage tells us that Martha was distracted. An interesting term from the original Greek word "*perispeo*", which can initially be translated as overwhelmed; also translated as worried, troubled —just as it appears in the NKJV of the Bible.

Someone that is overwhelmed, busy or troubled drags down with them everything and everybody in his or her surroundings. So, we can conclude that excessive worry is not good; not only for the person that suffers from it but the people in their environment that will be dragged down by the emotions in conflict.

Jesus diagnosed Martha as "*worried and upset*" —as from the NKJV of the Bible—. The term worried and troubled translates from the Greek word "*merimnáo*" which has its root in the word "*merizo*" and translates as leave, disengage, divide.

In what direction is this pronouncement pointing? What does it mean to be worried and troubled? It means that when you are in that condition, you are broken inside; it means that the parts that form your internal structure are divided, and have come loose. That is, therefore, a critical situation nobody wants to be in.

The words Jesus spoke to Martha were: "*You are troubled*". The word "troubled" translates from the Greek word "*turbazo*" which originates from the word "*turbe*" meaning muddy, disturbed, upset. And what does the word "troubled" mean? It means *to alter or interrupt the natural state of something*. It is the equivalent of interrupting violently or breaking the stillness.

How many people, without knowing, are the authors of their own crisis and their own lack of peace! According to this passage, humans in general, sabotage with self-destructive actions their peace of mind by getting used to living with heavy heart loads, full of negative thoughts. Therefore, the advice is to fill our hearts with the best elements. That was the advice given to Martha by Jesus. While Martha was troubled and busy, Maria had chosen the best part.

CHAPTER 6

FOR DIFFICULT TIMES, THE PSALM OF THE SHEPPERD!

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalms 23

As a closing chapter, I want to emphasize one phrase out of all these statements: *Your goodness and love (mercy) will follow me all the days of my life.*

I will break down this wonderful affirmation, to extract the elements that give nutrients and substance to our souls.

Goodness

Translated from the Hebrew word "*tob*", which in general means kindness in its broadest sense; it also means producing relief, benefactor. In the form of an adverb it means fine, abundant, right, friendly, beneficial, that makes you prosper.

This is what God will do with you! He will lighten your load and will provide a supportive answer. God will give you kindness, He will bless you properly. His answer will be favorable, and His presence will be beneficial and bring prosperity.

This term "*tob*" is so extensive that it is used as a greeting in the present day: "*Boker tov*" (good morning), "*Erev tov*" (good afternoon), "*Laila tov*" (good night).

Mercy

Translated from the original Hebrew word "*kjésed*", which means do benevolence, have mercy, have goodwill, do kindness, comfort without reproach.

At the same time, the word "*kjésed*" is linked to the word "*kjásad*" which means bow in kindness to one less than oneself. That reminds me of the image of Jesus Christ (the higher one) bowing to wash the feet of His disciples (the lower ones). Now, I also understand what Peter

meant when he said: "I won't let you wash my feet, my Lord" ... The divine mercy left him perplexed!

What wonderful knowledge! God offering His goodness without us deserving it. God having mercy despite our imperfections and sins. God comforting us without reproach even when our conducts are reprehensible to the utmost level. God bowing in kindness before us -who are inferior to Him-. Simply wonderful! Something good, totally undeserved.

Let us see an extraordinary example of a biblical character and how God's mercy took form so that we may take comfort for ourselves. The person I am referring to is Samson. The book of **Judges** tells us the following:

"After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved."

"Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus, he killed many more when he died than while he lived."

Judges 16:19-22 and 28-30

Samson did not fall from grace as a fortuitous cause or for any random reason. He lowered himself to that sad condition of defeat and slavery —to the point of serving as derision to his enemies, the Philistines—, as a result of his unstoppable impulses especially his attachment to beautiful women. That led him to ruin and he could not blame anyone for his failure and tragedy.

The mercy of God is so wonderful that when we least deserve it, He comes to us with His sovereign grace. Even though we don't deserve His grace, it follows us every day.... Thank you, God, for your grace!

In the case of Samson, God's mercy followed him to the worst day and the worst moment of his life history. God vindicated him from the defeat caused by his weakness and sin.

God's divine mercy began to manifest and flourish. When? We read in the passage about Samson that "*... the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.*"

With every cut of his seven braids, God's presence and the special anointing that had accompanied him since infancy was slowly leaving him. How does someone feel when thinking that he lost everything good he once received from God? Surely, he feels bad and in total despair. That is why the example of Samson is admirable; while he thought himself without hope or beyond redemption, God was already preparing His mercy towards him.

This reminds me of the portion of the scripture in the book of ***Psalms 94:18***:

"When I said, "My foot is slipping," your unfailing love, Lord, supported me."

Appeal to this wonderful promise!

**"YOUR GOODNESS AND LOVE WILL FOLLOW ME
ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE ..."**

Be strengthened by this word,

**GET UP TO CONTINUE WITH YOUR
DESTINATION!**

**START LIVING THE BEST TIMES,
IN THE WORST TIMES**



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