

Managing in Tough Times



SABBATH—MARCH 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Chronicles 20:1–22; 1 Chronicles 21:1–14; 2 Peter 3:3–12; Matthew 6:24.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Bring me thank offerings, because I am your God. Carry out the promises you made to me, because I am the Most High [above everyone and everything] God. Call out to me when trouble comes. I will save you. And you will honor me’ ” (Psalm 50:14, 15, NlrV).



When times are tough, we need to trust in God more than ever.

SOMETIMES WE FEEL as if everything in life is out of control. There is too much war, killing, crime, sex, sin, too many natural disasters, sicknesses, money problems, and bad governments. The list goes on! When bad things happen, families often think about taking care of their own needs first. Many people want to feel safe. Of course, we can understand that, right?

Our need to feel safe and take care of our needs can take a lot of our daily energy. We have loans and bills to pay, children to take care of, and property to manage. We need clothes, food, and shelter. Jesus talks about the need for these things in His Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, “ ‘Don't worry, because your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what he wants you to do. Then he will give you all these other things you need’ ” (Matthew 6:32, 33, ERV).

When times are tough, we need to trust in God more than ever. This week, we will look at some Bible rules that we can follow during hard times.

PUTTING GOD FIRST (2 Chronicles 20:1–22)

Read the story about King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:1–22. What important rules do we learn from this story? How can these rules help us trust God during hard times?

Jehoshaphat is the king of Judah. Near the end of Jehoshaphat's time as king, an army enters his kingdom without permission. Jehoshaphat is very brave and smart. He spent many years making his army and his cities strong. So, the king is ready to protect Israel. Jehoshaphat trusts in God to save him and his people. Jehoshaphat seeks the Lord with all his heart.

Jehoshaphat announces to all his people that they should join him in a fast. A fast is a time when people don't eat food for a short time. The people come together in the court outside the temple. Long ago, King Solomon told the people to come to the temple and pray when they were in danger. Then God would save them. All the people of Judah stand in front of God. The people pray that God will help them and honor His name. The king prays, " 'Our God, punish those people. We don't have the strength to stop this large army that is coming against us. We don't know what to do! We are looking to you for help' " (2 Chronicles 20:12, ERV).

The people give their hearts to God. Then a man of God gives a message to the people. The man says, " 'Don't be afraid or worry about this large army, because the battle is not your battle. It is God's battle! Tomorrow, they will come up through the Ziz Pass. You must go down to them. . . . You will not have to fight this battle. Just stand there and watch the LORD save you' " (2 Chronicles 20:15–17, ERV).

Early the next morning, the king met with the people. He put the singers at the front of his army to sing praises to God. Then the king told the people, " 'Trust in the Lord your God, and you will be made strong. Trust in the men who speak for Him, and you will do well' " (2 Chronicles 20:20, NLV). The singers started to sing. The enemies of Judah destroyed each other. None escaped (2 Chronicles 20:24). The men of Judah collected treasure from the dead army for three days. On day 4, the men of Judah came back to Jerusalem. They sang on their way into the city.

The God who saved them is the same God we love and worship. Our job is to trust in Him to lead us.



Jehoshaphat trusts in God to save him and his people. Jehoshaphat seeks the Lord with all his heart.

TRUST GOD TO SAVE YOU (1 Chronicles 21:1–14)

In 1 Samuel 14:1–23, the Bible tells the story about Jonathan. Jonathan was King Saul's son. Jonathan and the man who helped carry his battle suit won a fight against a very large group of Philistine soldiers. How did Jonathan win the fight? God helped him. David and Jonathan were best friends. David knew about Jonathan's experience with the Philistines. Sad to say, David didn't learn from his friend's experience. David let Satan lead him away from God. David trusted in his own strength and wisdom at this time and not in God.

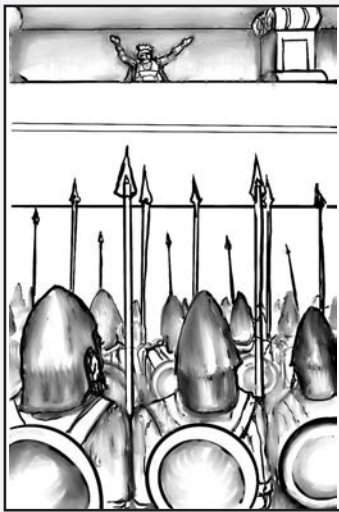
Read about David's sin in 1 Chronicles 21:1–14. Why did David decide to count his soldiers? Why did Joab, his general, tell David not to do it? (Also read 2 Samuel 24:1.)

Do you see that it was Satan's idea to count the soldiers? Satan tried to get David to trust in his own strength and not in God to save him. Joab was David's general. Joab told David not to count the soldiers. But David wanted proof that his army was very strong. A strong army had many soldiers. So, David counted his soldiers to convince himself that his army was very powerful. David had seen God work many times in the past to save Israel. So, Joab said David didn't need any more proof that God would protect them. When David counted his soldiers, he showed that he didn't trust in God. David showed that he put more faith in his army than he had in God to save Israel.

When we trust God, we always make the right choice. God will never fail us. At the same time, we ask God to fight for us and with us. We also must prepare for the fight. We must do everything we can to succeed. But in the end, we must understand that only God can help us win.

When times are tough, we must trust in God. We must not trust in our government or in our bank accounts. Look at all the stories in the Bible about people who were in trouble. When the people trusted in God, God helped them. Do you owe money? Trust God right now to help you pay off your loans and credit cards. When we pay what we owe, we will have more money to help people. Christians should not be selfish. We should share with other people the things God gives us.

We need to do all we can to take care of our needs. At the same time, we need to trust in God for all things. How can we do both things at the same time?



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ADVICE FOR TODAY (2 Peter 3:3–12)

What should Seventh-day Adventists do during tough times? We know we live in the end times. The Second Coming of Jesus will happen soon. So, we should use our money to support God's work on earth. People need to know the Good News that Jesus saves us from our sins. We need to tell them about all the wonderful things in heaven that God will give to the ones who love Him. We know that someday soon God will burn everything on this earth.

Read 2 Peter 3:3–12. What is Peter telling us in these verses?

We understand from the Bible that God is not sending moving vans to take our stuff to heaven! Everything on earth will burn in the future. This fire will destroy all signs of sin and evil except for the scars in Jesus' hands.

So, what should we do with all our stuff? "Seventh-day Adventists should not be collecting more stuff. They should be giving things away at this time. Soon, we will move to a better country. That country is heaven. So, let's not live on this earth as if it is our only home. Let's keep only the things we really need."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, page 59, adapted.

Yes, Ellen G. White wrote these words more than a hundred years ago! But the important rule is the same: time always is short because our lives are short. Maybe someone may live to be 100 years old. But that's not a very long time when we compare it to everlasting life. Your life can end in one minute. Then the next time you open your eyes, you see Jesus' Second Coming. That's fast, right?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we always must put God first. We must think about everlasting life. Yes, of course, we need to work hard to provide for ourselves and our families. If we have been blessed with wealth, we may enjoy it now with God's blessing. There is nothing wrong with that. But we must not be selfish or want too much. We must give what we can pay to help poor and needy people. We always must remember that our money and things will be worth nothing when Jesus comes back. If we aren't careful, our money and things can destroy our spiritual lives.



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AGAIN, PUT GOD FIRST (Matthew 6:24)

We must give everything to God. Then we may serve Him with our whole heart. God will accept nothing less from us. The Bible's teachings and stories show us this important spiritual truth. We are for God. Or we are against Him. We can't serve God and serve ourselves at the same time.

Someone asked Jesus which commandment was the most important. Jesus answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love him with all your soul [heart and mind]. Love him with all your mind. And love him with all your strength' " (Mark 12:30, WE). When we give everything to Jesus, we have nothing left to give to another master. That is the way it is. That is the way it must be.



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Read Matthew 6:24. What has been your own experience with the Bible truth in this verse?

Do you see that Jesus didn't say that it was hard to serve God and money? He didn't say that we need to be careful in how we serve both. No, Jesus said, that we **can't** serve both. It's impossible. This thought should make us very afraid to try to do that.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What three things in these verses does John warn us about? Why are these three things a danger to us?

No wonder Paul wrote, "Think about things that are in heaven. Don't think about things that are only on earth" (Colossians 3:2, NIRV). Of course, that's easier said than done. The things of the earth are right before us every day. Our wish for these things is strong. And so is the wish to have these things right now. So, we must be careful. The good news is that we can control ourselves. We can keep our eyes on the Lord.

Read 2 Peter 3:10–14. What Bible truth do we learn in these verses? How can this Bible truth change the way we live? How can it help us be good managers with our money?

**WHEN NO ONE CAN BUY OR SELL
(Revelation 13:11–17)**

The Bible tells us that there will be a time of trouble on this earth before Jesus comes back. Daniel writes about “a time of much trouble, the worst time since nations [people groups] have been on earth” (Daniel 12:1, ERV).

The book of Revelation also warns us that there will be hard times before the Second Coming.

Read about the hard times in Revelation 13:11–17. How will Satan use buying and selling to attack God’s loyal followers at the end times?

You can’t buy or sell? How much of our lives today includes buying and selling? If we can’t buy or sell, we will have a hard time living. We will feel a lot of pressure to do whatever it takes to keep our money safe. The more money we have at that time, the more pressure we will feel to honor the laws of the land.

How do we get ready for that terrible test? We get ready now by making sure we aren’t slaves to our money and our stuff. God will help us with that. If we are not slaves of money and things now, we won’t be slaves of money and things later, when we need to give them up.

Read God’s command in Deuteronomy 14:22, 23. What did God command His people to do with their crops, oil, wine, and flocks each year? Why did God tell Israel to do this?

God commanded the Israelites to enjoy the gifts of food that He gave them from the land. Why did God want His people to eat this offering of food? Because the people would learn to love God and be thankful for all He gave them. Then the people would want to obey God with all their hearts. God wants us to enjoy the gifts He gives us, too. Then we will love God and want to obey Him.



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The Bible doesn't say that riches are wrong. But the Bible does tell us that riches don't make us more loyal to God. Most of the time, riches are a danger to our connection with God. "The love of money and the wish for riches is the same as a gold chain. Satan puts this chain around people and makes them his slaves."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 44, adapted.

Most Christians are not rich. But many of us do have a lot of stuff. We have refrigerators stuffed with more food than we can eat. We may own more than one car. Many of us take vacations every year. Many of us shop online or own the newest computers and fancy smartphones. These things make it easier to love the things on this earth, right? So, we need to be careful. Just because we are not millionaires doesn't mean we aren't in danger from riches. Having so many things can cause us to forget God. That's why God commanded us to pay tithe. As we saw, tithe is 10% of all the money we get. This plan is a powerful blessing that will help keep us safe from the dangers of money. Money can be dangerous, even when you have little money.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Maybe we aren't rich. What danger can money and riches be to us if we're poor? Why must we be careful?
- ② God commanded us to pay tithe to keep us safe from loving the things of this life more than we should. What else can we do, along with paying tithe, to make sure we're safe from loving money?
- ③ What if you were told you can no longer buy or sell anything tomorrow? What if you are told that you won't be allowed to buy or sell tomorrow because you keep the commandments of God and you have the same faith Jesus had (Revelation 14:12)? What will you choose to do?

TWO BEST FRIENDS

Bahadu Ibrahim lives in the middle of Malawi. Both of his parents were non-Christian. His parents expected him to accept their religion. Bahadu didn't know any other religion, so he accepted their religion as his own.

Then one of Bahadu's older brothers married a Seventh-day Adventist woman and joined the Adventist Church. When Bahadu was a teenager, his parents sent him to live with his brother and his brother's wife in Lilongwe. Lilongwe is the capital city of Malawi. When Sabbath came, Bahadu's brother wanted Bahadu to go to church with him. Bahadu really didn't want to go. But he felt he had no choice. So, for two years, Bahadu went to church every Sabbath.

After the two years, Bahadu went home to his parents in Kaluluma village. There, Bahadu made friends with another teenager. The teenager was an Adventist. Bahadu liked his new friend very much. His friend was kind and caring. Everyone in the village liked the young man and said many wonderful things about him.

The young man invited Bahadu to go to church with him on Sabbath. Bahadu really did not care about going to church. But he enjoyed spending time with his new best friend, even in church. So, Bahadu went to church with his friend. As time passed, their friendship grew. Bahadu's friend explained that the seventh-day Sabbath was the true Sabbath of God. The friend gave Bahadu books to read. Little by little, Bahadu started to understand new Bible truth about God and the Sabbath. But Bahadu wasn't convinced that Saturday was the true Sabbath. Bahadu decided to compare the Bible with the holy book from his family's religion. But Bahadu didn't tell his parents what he was doing. He studied the Bible in secret. As Bahadu read the Bible, he discovered that Jesus is Lord. Bahadu decided to give his heart to Jesus and get baptized. Bahadu no longer went to church because he felt forced to go. He went to spend special time with Jesus, his new best friend.

After Bahadu got baptized, his parents refused to have anything to do with him. They stopped paying his school bill. So, Bahadu couldn't finish school with the rest of his class. Both of Bahadu's parents died before accepting his decision to be a Christian. Bahadu has strong faith. He says, "The best decision I ever made was to become a Christian." Today, he is a student at Malawi Adventist University, where he studies to become a pastor.

This quarter's offering will support six learning centers and schools in Africa.

INSIDE
Story
by CHIFUNDO KANJO



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