

Managing *in* Tough Times



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Chron. 20:1–22, 1 Chron. 21:1–14, 2 Pet. 3:3–12, 1 John 2:15–17, Rev. 13:11–17.*

Memory Text: “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (*Psalms 50:14, 15, NKJV*).

Sometimes our world seems to be spinning out of control: wars, bloodshed, crime, immorality, natural disasters, pandemics, economic uncertainty, political corruption, and more. There is a strong urge for individuals and families to think first of their own survival. Accordingly, much thought is given to seeking security in these uncertain times, which, of course, is understandable.

The toils of life do take a lot of our daily focus. With debts to pay, children to raise, property to maintain, it does take time and thought. And, of course, we do need clothes, food, and shelter. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed these very basic needs and then stated, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (*Matt. 6:32, 33, NKJV*).

Amid trying times, when we need to lean on the Lord more than ever, there are some concrete steps, based on biblical principles, that we should follow.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 18.

Putting God First

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–22. What important spiritual principles can we take from this story for ourselves, whatever struggles we are facing?

Toward the close of Jehoshaphat’s reign, Judah was invaded. Jehoshaphat was a man of courage and valor. For years he had been strengthening his armies and his fortified cities. He was well prepared to meet almost any enemy; yet in this crisis, he did not put his confidence in his own strength but in the power of God. He set himself to seek the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. The people all gathered together in the court of the temple, as Solomon had prayed that they would do if faced by danger. All the men of Judah stood before the Lord with their wives and children. They prayed that God would confuse their enemies and that His name might be glorified. Then the king prayed, “ ‘We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You’ ” (2 Chron. 20:12, NKJV).

After they committed themselves to God in this manner, the Spirit of the Lord came upon a man of God, who said, “ ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. . . . You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD’ ” (2 Chron. 20:15–17, NKJV).

So, early the next morning, the king assembled the people, with the Levitical choir in the front to sing the praises of God. Then he admonished the people, “ ‘Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper’ ” (2 Chron. 20:20, NKJV). Then the choir began to sing, and their enemies destroyed one another, and “none escaped” (2 Chron. 20:24). It took the men of Judah three days just to collect the spoils of the battle, and on the fourth day they returned to Jerusalem, singing as they went.

Of course, the God who delivered them is the same God whom we love and worship, and His power is just as great today as back then. The challenge, for us, is to trust in Him and His leading.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:20. What special significance should this text have for Seventh-day Adventists?

Trust God, Not Your Own Resources

King David should have known better. He should have known from the experience of his best friend, Jonathan, that when you are in covenant relationship with God, it doesn't matter whether you have a few men or many; God can give you the victory. In 1 Samuel 14:1–23, the Bible records the story of how Saul's son Jonathan and Jonathan's armor-bearer defeated an entire garrison of Philistines—with the help of God. But in spite of this experience and many others in the history of God's people, when difficult times came to King David, he allowed Satan to tempt him to trust in his own strength and ingenuity.

Read 1 Chronicles 21:1–14. Why did David decide to number Israel or count his soldiers? Why did his commander Joab counsel against this?

Note that it was Satan's idea to count the soldiers. He tempted David to trust in his own strength rather than to depend on the providence of God in his defense. Joab, the leader of Israel's army, tried to persuade David not to number Israel because he had seen God work on behalf of Israel, but David demanded that the numbering go forward. His actions brought calamity to the nation, as the text reveals.

No one ever trusted God in vain. Whenever you do battle for the Lord, prepare yourself. And prepare well too. There's a quote, attributed to a British ruler, Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), who, before a battle, said to his army, "Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry!" (The powder was gunpowder.) In other words, do all that you can to succeed, but, in the end, realize that only God can give you victory.

In our immediate context, it is very tempting to trust in the power of the government or in our bank accounts, but in every crisis mentioned in the Bible, when the people trusted in God, He honored their trust and provided for them.

We should be using the present time to get square with God, get out of debt, and be generous with what we have been given. In the words of the well-known, Thomas Dorsey gospel song, "If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now."

How do we strike the right balance between doing what we can, for instance, to be financially secure, and yet, at the same time, trusting in the Lord for all things?

Time to Simplify?

What should Seventh-day Adventist Christians do in response to difficult times? Do we hunker down in a survival mode? No, in fact, just the opposite is true. Because we know that the end of the world and the second coming of Christ is near, we want to use our assets to tell others the good news of the gospel and what God has prepared for those who love Him. We understand that someday soon everything on this earth will be burned up.

Read 2 Peter 3:3–12. What is Peter telling us with these words?

We understand from the Word of God that He is not sending moving vans to take our stuff to heaven. It will all get burned up in the final conflagration when all traces of sin and evil will be forever destroyed.

So, what should we do with our possessions? “It is now that our brethren should be cutting down their possessions instead of increasing them. We are about to move to a better country, even a heavenly. Then let us not be dwellers upon the earth, but be getting things into as compact a compass as possible.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 59.

Of course, she wrote those words more than a century ago! But still the principle remains: time is always short, because our lives are always short. What are 60, 80, or 100 years (if you have good genes and good health practices) in contrast to eternity? Your life can end before you finish reading this week’s lesson, and the next thing you will know is the second coming of Jesus. (*Wow, that was fast after all, wasn’t it?*)

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we must always live in the light of eternity. Yes, of course, we need to work hard to provide for ourselves and our families; and if we have been blessed with wealth, nothing is wrong with enjoying it now, provided we don’t become greedy and are generous with it in regard to the needy. Yet, we must always remember that whatever we accumulate here is transitory; fleeting; and, if we are not careful, has the potential to be spiritually corrupting.

If you knew Jesus were coming within ten years, how would you change your life? Or within five years? Or three?

Priorities

The parables and teachings of Jesus, the stories of Bible characters, and the counsel of Ellen G. White all indicate clearly that there is no halfway commitment to Christ. Either we are or we are not on the Lord's side.

When asked by a scribe which commandment was the greatest, Jesus answered, “ ‘ “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” ’ ” (*Mark 12:30, NKJV*). When we give all to Christ, there is nothing left for another master. That is the way it is. That is the way it must be.

Read Matthew 6:24. What has been your own experience with the truth of these words?

Notice, Jesus didn't say that it was hard to serve God and money, or that you needed to be careful in how you served both. He said, instead, that it *couldn't be done*. Period. This thought should put a bit of fear and trembling in our souls (*Phil. 2:12*).

Read 1 John 2:15–17. How are these three things manifested in our world, and why is the danger they present sometimes more subtle than we realize?

No wonder Paul wrote, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Col. 3:2*). Of course, that's easier said than done, because the things of the world are right here before us every day. The lure of “all that is in the world” is strong; the pull for immediate gratification is always there, whispering in our ears or pulling on our shirt sleeves—or both. Hasn't even the most faithful Christian felt some love for “the things of the world”? Even with our knowledge that one day it will all end, we still feel the pull, don't we? The good news, however, is that we don't need to let it pull us away from the Lord.

Read 2 Peter 3:10–14. How should what Peter says here impact how we live, including what we do with our resources?

When No One Can Buy or Sell

The Bible paints a painful picture of the world before the second coming of Jesus. Daniel writes about “ ‘a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time’ ” (*Dan. 12:1, NKJV*). Considering some of the troublous times in the past, what he is referring to here must be pretty bad.

The book of Revelation also points to troubling times before the return of Christ.

Read Revelation 13:11–17. How do financial matters fit in with the end-time persecution?

You can't buy or sell? How much of our lives today revolves around buying and selling? Our work is, in a sense, our selling of our time and skills and goods to those who want to buy them. Not being able to buy or sell all but means not being able to function in society. The pressure on those who remain faithful will then be enormous. Plus, the more money that you have, the more stake you will have in this world, at least in terms of material possessions, and so, surely, the pressure to conform will be even stronger.

How then do we prepare? We prepare now, by making sure through God's grace that we are not slaves to our money, to the things of the world. If we are not bound to them now, we won't be when we will, in order to be faithful, have to give them up.

Read Deuteronomy 14:22 and the last part of verse 23. What were God's people to do with their increase or production each year? Why did God ask them to do this?

God explained through Moses that one of the reasons He established the tithing system was “ ‘that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always’ ” (*Deut. 14:23, NKJV*). In the poetic parallelism of Psalm 31:19, we see that fear is synonymous with trust. “Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You” (*NKJV*).

These parallel lines show us that to fear the Lord is to trust Him. Therefore, we understand that God established the tithing system to protect us from selfishness and to encourage us to trust Him to provide for us. While being faithful in tithe is certainly not a guarantee that people will stay faithful in the end, those who are not faithful in tithe are surely setting themselves up for trouble.

Further Thought: Though nothing in the Bible warns against wealth, nothing in the Bible talks about wealth as increasing one's spiritual commitment either. In fact, the opposite danger is true. "The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them [people] to Satan." —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 44.

In fact, since the founding of Christianity, no church has ever partaken of such wealth and creature comforts as the church in many countries of the world enjoys today. The question is: At what cost? Such affluence surely influences our spirituality—and not for the good either. How could it? Since when have wealth and material abundance fostered the Christian virtues of self-denial and self-sacrifice? Can coming home to refrigerators stuffed with more food than we can eat, and owning one or two cars, and taking yearly vacations, and shopping online, and having the latest in home computers and smartphones make it easier to love not the world nor the things in the world? Though many members of our church don't have these luxuries, many do—and they do so at the peril of their own souls. We are not talking about the "rich" now, as in millionaires and beyond. They at least know that they're rich, and they can heed (if they choose) the biblical cautions given them. We're talking, instead, about many even of the middle-class people, who—amid smartphones, iMacs, air-conditioning, and SUVs—are fooled enough to think that because they are just "middle class," they are not in danger of being spiritually pickled by their own prosperity. That's why tithing can be, if nothing else, a powerful spiritual antidote to the dangers of wealth, even for those who are not particularly "wealthy."

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Even if we are not rich by the world's standards, why must we all be careful about our attitude toward money and wealth?
- 2 What are some practical things we can do, besides tithing, that can help us make sure we are not getting too caught up in the things of this world?
- 3 What would happen to you tomorrow if, suddenly, you could not buy or sell because you are numbered among those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*)? How well would your faith fare?

Two Best Friends

By CHIFUNDO KANJO

Bahadu Ibrahim was born to non-Christian parents who expected him to follow their faith in central Malawi. He had no problem with that because he did not know any other religion.

But then an older brother married a Seventh-day Adventist woman and joined the Adventist Church. As a teen, Bahadu was sent by his parents to live with his brother and his wife in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe. When Sabbath came, his brother expected him to go to church with them. Bahadu did not want to go, but he felt like he had no choice. For two years, he went to church every Sabbath out of a sense of duty.

Returning to his parents in Kaluluma village, he thought to forget the Bible. But he made friends with another teenager who happened to be an Adventist. Bahadu admired his new friend very much for his kindness and gentleness. Everyone in the village admired the young man and spoke highly of him.

One Sabbath, the friend invited Bahadu to go to church. What could Bahadu do? He went. He was glad to spend time with his best friend, even in church. As time passed, their friendship grew, and Bahadu listened to his friend explain that the seventh day was the true Sabbath of God. His friend gave him books to read. Little by little, he understood new truths about God and the Sabbath. However, he was not convinced that Saturday was the true Sabbath. Without his parents' knowledge, he decided to compare the Bible with his family's traditional religious book. As he read, he discovered that his family's religious book contained only one woman's name, Maryam, the mother of Jesus. He also discovered that Jesus is Lord. Bahadu decided to give his heart to Jesus in baptism. He no longer went to church out of sense of duty. He went to spend special time with his new best friend.

After Bahadu's baptism, his parents disowned him and stopped paying his high-school fees, leaving him unable to graduate with the rest of his class. Both of his parents died without accepting his decision, and many relatives continue to treat him with hostility today. But Bahadu has not wavered in his faith. "This is the best decision that I have ever made," he said. Today he is a student at Malawi Adventist University, studying to become a pastor.



Thank you for your 2021 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that is helping to construct a community outreach and leadership development center on the Mzuzu campus of Malawi Adventist University, where BAHADU studies, in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. This quarter's offering will support six additional educational projects in the neighboring East-Central Africa Division.

Part I: Overview

We must seek first the kingdom of God (*Matt. 6:34*) because He is the Creator and Keeper of all things (*Gen. 2:7, Ps. 119:91*). He is our Shepherd (*Psalms 23*), our very present help in trouble (*Ps. 46:1*). It is better to trust in Him (*Ps. 118:8*) than in people (*Ps. 17:5*).

Jehoshaphat trusted in God and the prophets amid national crisis (*2 Chron. 20:20*). The remnant of God should, and will, likewise trust (*Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10, 2 Tim. 3:14–17*). Such trust in divine power promotes spiritual security and prosperity in the church. On the other hand, David sought security in the number of men he had (*1 Chron. 21:1–14*) for military purposes (*1 Chron. 21:5*), with tragic results.

The Bible teaches us that, along with trusting God, we must be prudent (*Prov. 6:8, Prov. 27:22*). Thus, our lives should be modest, temperate, and without ostentation (*1 Tim. 2:9*). Laying up material possessions may cause undue anxiety, overshadowing one's happiness in this life. Such anxiety puts us at risk of losing our faith. Thus, we must guard against loving and trusting more in riches than in God (*Prov. 11:28, 1 Tim. 6:10*).

Additionally, money may lose its value for us at any time, because eventually we will not be able to buy or sell (*Rev. 13:17*). Ultimately, money will be consumed in the fire (*2 Pet. 3:10–12*), together with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (*1 John 2:15–17*). Being faithful now in tithes and offerings is one of the ways we return to God (*Mal. 3:7, 8*), whom we are to fear all the days of our life (*Deut. 6:2*). In so doing, we prepare to overcome in the time of the great tribulation.

Part II: Commentary

Even though the great tribulation is a time of deep anguish and affliction for God's people (*Ps. 34:19, John 16:33*), we must remain faithful (*1 Cor. 4:2*).

Trust in God as Daily Preparation

Ever since sin entered this world (*Gen. 2:17*), life has been filled with thorns and thistles (*Gen. 3:16–19*), oppression (*Eccles. 4:1*), sorrow, and grief (*Eccles. 2:22, 23*). But we must trust in God and move forward in faith, strengthening ourselves for greater trials yet to come (*Jer. 12:5*). A life of dependence on and faithfulness to God in the small daily trials serves as preparation for still greater trials to come. He who is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much (*Luke 16:10*).

Therefore, honor God now with your offerings of gratitude. Likewise, fulfill your vows (particularly those you made in baptism), because God promises to answer and deliver His faithful ones in the day of trouble and tribulation (*Ps. 50:14, 15*). The word “tribulation” (in Hebrew: *tsarah*) literally means “tightness,” in the sense of trouble, adversity, affliction, anguish, and distress, which affects the wealthy and the poor, believers and unbelievers alike. But we have the assurance in our trials that God provides solace and answers to our petitions, according to His will (*1 John 5:14*).

Faithful in the Perplexities of Wealth

Sometimes money issues deprive us of sleep (*Eccles. 5:12*), attract thieves (*Matt. 6:19*), bring false friends (*Prov. 14:20, Prov. 19:4*), give rise to greed (*Eccles. 4:8, Eccles. 5:10*), and may lead to self-conceit (*Prov. 28:11*) or indifference toward others (*Prov. 18:23*). We cannot set our heart on riches (*Ps. 62:10*). Additionally, bankruptcy (*Prov. 5:14, Prov. 27:24*) may sometimes be unavoidable and painful. So it always is wise to remember that it is better to have little in the Lord than much with trouble (*Prov. 15:16*).

Jehoshaphat had riches and armies, but they were no match for the unexpected crisis that threatened him. This crisis was greater than anything he could prepare for. However, Jehoshaphat trusted in God and prophetic guidance, and his story became a testimony of great divine deliverance (*2 Chron. 20:1–22*). This incredible story is a lesson for the Adventist Church to trust in God and in the prophetic guidance it has received (*2 Chron. 20:20, Eph. 4:11–13, Rev. 12:17, Rev. 19:10*).

In contrast, we have the story of David, who incurred the displeasure of God for his presumption. Even with all the evidence of divine watch-care in his past, David sinned by numbering the people (*1 Chron. 21:1–14*) without consulting his prophet (*1 Chron. 21:1–4, 9–13*). We may think that we don’t need prophetic guidance. How quickly we see our folly when chaos descends. The fact that divine wrath and judgment came upon the people (*2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:7, 11, 12*) shows that, somehow, they shared in the king’s sin.

In the Hebrew mindset, God is ultimately in control of everything (*Dan. 4:35, Isa. 46:10*). Not even a sparrow perishes without the Father knowing (*Matt. 10:29*). Everything happens only by divine permission or will, which, at the same time, respects individual choice and responsibility (*2 Sam. 24:11, 12; Deut. 30:19*).

When Pharaoh hardened his own heart (*Exod. 8:15, 19, 32*), the Bible at times ascribed this action to God (*Exod. 10:20, 27; Exod. 11:10*), showing that God permitted Pharaoh to make his own choices. God restricts evil, but, ultimately, the individual makes the decision and bears the responsibility for his or her choices.

In David's case, it was not forbidden, neither was it a sin, to number the people (*Num. 1:2, 3, 19*). But in this particular instance, the act of numbering was a sin (*1 Chron. 21:8*), possibly because David trusted in the illusion of military might (*1 Chron. 21:5*) instead of trusting in the true Source of strength: God (*Jer. 17:5*). The lesson here for us is that God is above all things. We need to go to Him first, before resorting to human means of deliverance.

Knowledge, power, fame, physical beauty, and positions of influence, without the fear of the Lord, may lead to negative consequences similar to those resulting from acquiring riches without the blessing or help of God. Therefore, we need to appreciate divine wisdom more than any material gift (*Prov. 2:1–6, Prov. 4:7, Prov. 8:11*).

Faithful in the Perplexities of Poverty

An excessive lack of money also causes harm, given that it has the opposite effect of riches. The poor are persecuted (*Ps. 10:2*), despised (*Prov. 14:20, Prov. 19:7*), and exploited (*Deut. 24:14*). That is why those who are wise pray for balance (*Prov. 30:8*).

God is Lord of the rich and the poor (*Prov. 22:2*). He doesn't despise the poor for being poor, because His own Son came as a poor Man among the poor (*2 Cor. 8:9*). Neither does God favor the rich because they are rich, for all riches are His (*Hag. 2:8*). Instead, God requires all His children to be faithful stewards of His means (*1 Cor. 4:2, Rev. 2:10*).

We should remember that the reason to trust in divine help is that God is Creator of "heaven and earth" (*Ps. 121:1, 2*). This same reason was introduced by Melchizedek before receiving Abram's tithe (*Gen. 14:19, 20*) and was the motive for the patriarch's rejection of the riches of wicked Sodom (*Gen. 14:22, 23*).

Relying on God Is a Learning Experience.

In the biblical teaching method, learning (in Hebrew: *lamad*) involves theory and practice, as shown in the religion of ancient Israel. According to Deuteronomy, learning should take place by hearing (*Deut. 4:10*), teaching the congregation (*Deut. 4:5, 14; Deut. 31:12*), singing God's words (*Deut. 31:19, 22*), and reading (*Deut. 17:19*). Additionally, learning should be transmitted to children by speaking to them while they sit, walk, lie down, and rise up (*Deut. 11:19*), thus encouraging communion with God and trust in His covenant.

The above passages frequently link the words "learn" (*lamad*) and "practice," indicating that learning takes place by experiencing God's truth and fearing Him. In this sense, tithes and offerings also were, and still are, divine instructions, as they teach commitment to God's work (*Mal. 3:8–10*), as well as to honor and praise (Heb. *kabad*) His name

(*Prov. 3:9*). The general learning objective of the religious activities in Israel is repeated in the second tithing consecrated to family devotion and charity: “ ‘that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always’ ” (*Deut. 14:23, NKJV*). (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 530–536.)

Faithfulness in Preparing for the Trials of the Last Days

In the last days, people will be lovers of money. We must shun their influence (*2 Tim. 3:1–5*) because covetousness is idolatry (*Eph. 5:5*). John warns us that idolators will be left out of the Holy City (*Rev. 22:14, 15*). Additionally, legal measures one day will prevent God’s people from buying and selling (*Rev. 13:11–17*), and all that was withheld from the Lord, together with the treasures of Babylon (*Rev. 18:10–16*), will perish in the fire (*2 Pet. 3:3–10*).

Death is unexpected. The lack of awareness among the dead of a sense of time until the coming of Jesus makes death a sleep (*1 Thess. 4:13, 14; 1 Cor. 15:52*). Thus, we always need to be faithful in everything while we still draw breath. From our own perspective and experience, Christ’s coming will be as soon as the day of our death, for the period between death and the resurrection will be like the blinking of an eye. The final reward then will be given to each one, according to their works (*Matt. 16:27*).

Daily communion with God and modest living must be life’s rules because we don’t know what hour the Lord will come (*Matt. 24:42, 44*).

Part III: Life Application

In these last days, times have been perilous (*2 Tim. 3:1*). With this peril in mind, remind your students that God requires them to fulfill two sacred duties: (a) advancing God’s kingdom on this earth and (b) staying faithful during trials and persecution.

A. God’s Followers Must Give Heed to the Advancement of God’s Work.

“The work of God is to become more extensive, and if His people follow His counsel, there will not be much means in their possession to be consumed in the final conflagration. All will have laid up their treasure where moth and rust cannot corrupt; and the heart will not have a cord to bind it to earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 60.

1. How can you be more faithful with your means? In what ways are you withholding the Lord’s portion, which will “be consumed in the final conflagration”?

2. Lot's wife looked back to the possessions that held her heart; thus, she met a tragic end (*Gen. 19:26*). What can you do so that your heart will "not have a cord to bind it to earth" and so that you will not look back as Lot's wife did?

B. We Must Be Faithful Amid Hardships.

"When the Light of the world passes by, privilege will be discerned in hardship, order in confusion, success in apparent failure. Calamities will be seen as disguised blessings; woes, as mercies."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 270.

Even those who are faithful go through trials (*John 16:33*). Ask a student to share with the class how he or she learned to depend fully on God in a time of tribulation. How did this experience teach your student that God is fully in control of everything and works all things out for his or her good? How did this experience increase your student's trust in God and in His faithfulness? Ask other students to share with the class the lessons they learned from this class member's experience.

Notes