

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

Special Edition

## FAITH IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Keep believing and  
trusting

## The Peace of God

It can be yours!

## Why Suffering?

Answers to the  
age-old question

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### ALWAYS WITH YOU

The Bible lets us know that we can expect to go through some difficult times while we're on this earth.<sup>1</sup> The good news is that it also promises that we won't have to go through them alone. God promises to always be there for us. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."<sup>2</sup> "I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken."<sup>3</sup>

God wants to hear about our burdens and for us to give Him all our cares, so that He can bring hope to our heart, peace to our soul, and strength to our life.<sup>4</sup> Of course, God is not *only* interested in our struggles; He cares about *everything* we experience throughout our lives, from our smallest victories to our greatest fears and everything in between.

Once Jesus comes into our lives, His presence is always with us. Sometimes we can feel it, sometimes not, but by faith we can say like King David of old: "The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time."<sup>5</sup> While David had his difficult moments when he felt overwhelmed,<sup>6</sup> ultimately he knew that God would never forsake him in times of trouble.—And neither will He forsake us.<sup>7</sup>

We hope this *Activated* Special Edition will be a blessing and encourage you that whatever happens, *you are never alone!*

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1. See John 16:33.

2. Psalm 23:4 NIV

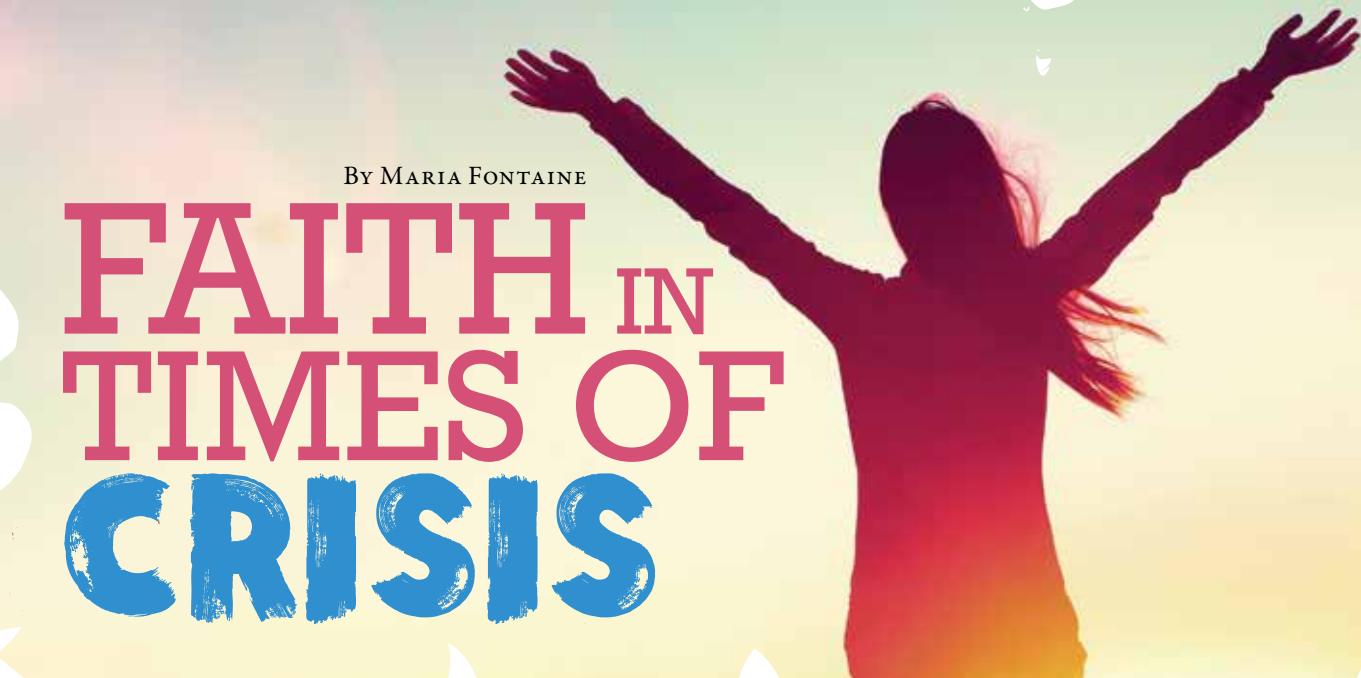
3. Psalm 16:8 NLT

4. See 1 Peter 5:7.

5. Psalm 34:19 NLT

6. See Psalm 61:2.

7. See Hebrews 13:5.



BY MARIA FONTAINE

# FAITH IN TIMES OF CRISIS

NO MATTER HOW DEVASTATING, irreversible, or hopeless things seem when you're facing a major setback or a life-threatening situation, you can choose to continue to actively trust in Jesus and refuse to let go of that abiding trust. Faith isn't the absence of fear; faith is what overcomes fear.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. We wouldn't be hoping for something if we already had it in our hands. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.<sup>1</sup> We wouldn't need evidence that something is real if we could see it with our eyes.

You know that God will ultimately make things right in the next life, but that knowledge doesn't lessen the struggles of possibly facing very painful experiences or death. At this moment in time it's not the next life that you are having to deal with, it's the present.

It can be pretty scary when you're in a bad situation and you can't see any natural way out of the dilemma. But that's when faith comes to the fore. You just have to keep believing and trusting, no matter what things look like.

You have to keep walking on the solid ground of what God has told you to do in spite of dire circumstances, knowing that no matter how hopeless it looks or how bad things get, Jesus has you in His arms.

You may feel afraid of what you're facing. You may not see anything you can do to fix the situation you're in. But God's intervention in your life isn't based on your self-confidence. It's based on your belief in Him and your trust in His unlimited power, goodness, and love.

You just have to believe that God can bring about what is best in His time and His way, if not in this life, then in the life to come, because you trust Him. Faith knows what is most important to know: God will never leave you nor forsake you.<sup>2</sup>

None of us know what lies ahead. We often can't know if that setback we're facing or the things we're suffering will be gone in a minute or a month, or if they will last a lifetime. What faith knows is that Jesus will not leave us comfortless; He'll be there walking with us.

Jesus is proud of us when we look at the waves and the winds of adversity and do like Peter did with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Bid me come out to you on the water."<sup>3</sup> He was ready to jump right into the challenges because he'd seen God's power in Jesus and was ready to put himself into those hands that he trusted would never fail him.

What are the challenges that you're facing? What impossible situations are looming big in your life? Will you step out on the waters to meet Jesus right now so that His power can be manifested in your life? Take the step of faith, and even if you feel that momentary sinking feeling at times, you only have to call out to Him and He'll bring you through in His perfect time and way. ■

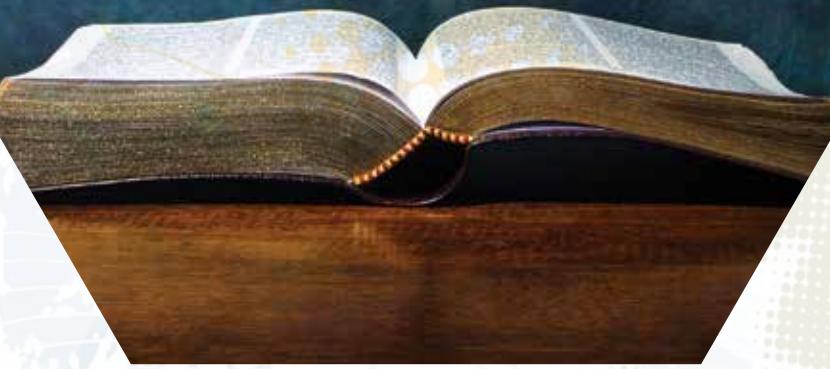
1. Hebrews 11:1

2. See Hebrews 13:5.

3. See Matthew 14:28.

BY ALLAN TABARO

# DRAWING ON GOD'S STRENGTH



JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS A FEW YEARS AGO, I was involved in a car accident that almost took my life. I sustained a spinal cord injury to my T4 vertebra, leaving me paraplegic, paralyzed from the chest down, and confined to a wheelchair.

Nothing can prepare anyone for coping with paraplegia and disability, especially to the extent that you have to rely almost completely on others for assistance. Suddenly the things you had taken for granted, like getting out of bed and walking to the bathroom, are no longer possible because your body refuses to function. Questions flood your mind, and fear, doubt, and anxiety can get the better of you. It was like being in a bad dream, struggling to come to

terms with what was happening, and hoping to wake up.

My family and friends were encouraging and stood by my side, but in the end, the difficult choice to stay positive and carry on with life is always a personal one. In my experience, though, it *is* possible to carry on.

It's tough to deal with disappointment, and we always want to figure things out, but if faced with something man or money cannot fix, who do you turn to for answers? I had nowhere to turn but to God. My girlfriend gave me a Bible and told me I would find the answers I was looking for in it.

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else," I read, "and he will give you everything you need."<sup>1</sup> I set out to keep my end of the bargain, and God has been faithful to keep His.

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.—Eleanor Roosevelt

I've learned that He isn't surprised by our moments of pain in the valleys; in fact, He's quietly waiting for us to call out to Him so He can enlighten our darkness. It's one thing to be a Christian, and another to truly know who Jesus is.

God showed me that He cared as much about the condition of my spirit as that of my paralyzed body. Before my injury, I was easily distracted by the things of this world, and I got my happiness and security from them. Now I know that none of this compares to the love of Jesus, which comforts to the uttermost. He will heal the wounds and sicknesses of our souls and plant seeds of hope in the most difficult conditions. His light will shine into the deepest valleys. "[He] is our refuge and strength and a present help in times of trouble."<sup>2</sup> ■

1. Matthew 6:33 NLT  
2. Psalm 46:1



# FEELING UNSETLED?

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

IN PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7, the apostle Paul instructs the church: “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.”<sup>1</sup>

We live in a world with an increasingly rapid pace of change, and change brings uncertainty. Uncertainty tends to bring worry, stress, and a general feeling of being unsettled. Feeling unsettled, uneasy, and anxious tends to sap your joy and faith, and can leave you feeling frazzled, nervous, distracted, and emotionally exhausted.

There are several wonderful promises in the Bible on this topic which give both spiritual and practical advice.

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”<sup>2</sup>

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”<sup>3</sup>

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”<sup>4</sup>

Learning to “cast all our cares on Him” and be “anxious about nothing” is easier said than applied, and learning to not give in to anxiety can be a process that requires practical steps on our part. We need to make a conscious effort to give our burdens to the Lord. We need to learn to surrender our fears and worries to Him. We need to meditate on God’s Word and become practiced in the art of focusing our thoughts on things that are praiseworthy, noble, good, true, honorable, and right.<sup>5</sup> We have to replace bad habits with good ones that lead us to a healthy lifestyle.

Some people assume that once you become a Christian and put your trust in the Lord, He automatically protects you from bad things. That’s not how trust works. Trust doesn’t eliminate problems, stress, or difficulties that might arise, but it does provide us a firm foundation for our confidence: God. Trust gives us an outlet for our anxiety: God.

I find it helpful to review God’s promises to remind myself of His unconditional love for me. He loves me. He loves you. He cares. He wants to help us. He has promised to take care of us. When we put ourselves and our loved ones in His faithful care, we can know that is the best place possible.

There are also some helpful practical tips, such as writing down your concerns and anxieties. This is especially helpful if you have a lot on your mind. Just listing it all can bring some relief. Write down your worries and then give them to Jesus. Pray daily over your list. Find a promise from the Bible to claim for each item, or for the list overall.

If we can keep a more heavenly perspective, we’ll enjoy life’s journey more. Granted, the problems we face in life are not “easy.” But Jesus promises to give us strength to enable us to carry those problems. He says, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”<sup>6</sup> When we draw on His strength, we can have peace in the midst of a storm and deep joy even in trying circumstances.

Jesus is our source of peace. His name “is a strong tower,” which we can “run into and be safe.”<sup>7</sup> ■

1. NIV

2. Psalm 55:22 ESV

3. 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

4. John 14:27 ESV

5. Philippians 4:8

6. Matthew 11:30

7. Proverbs 18:10



# THE POINTS TO PONDER PEACE OF GOD

## Inner peace

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.—*Philippians 4:7*

Our daily lives can easily become filled with stress, pressure, and confusion. But we can stop at any moment and slip away into the presence of God's Spirit through

prayer and meditation, and there find peace and refreshment.—*Maria Fontaine*

If we have not quiet in our minds, outward comfort will do no more for us than a golden slipper on a gouty foot.—*John Bunyan*

Dear restless heart, be still, for peace is God's own smile,  
His love can every wrong and sorrow reconcile;  
Just love, and love, and love, and calmly wait awhile.  
—*Edith Willis Linn*

Peace comes not from the absence of trouble, but from the presence of God.—*Unknown*

Jesus lay in the boat sleeping. The waves rose, the wind blew and the storm battered the small vessel about. His disciples were afraid: afraid of the wind, afraid of the waves and fearful for their lives. They came to Jesus, woke Him up, begging for His help. The answer lay in His power. He said, "Peace, be still," and there was peace. The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.<sup>1</sup> No matter the turmoil of our life, we too can

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1. See Mark 4:35–41.
  2. Matthew 22:39
  3. Matthew 11:28
  4. Isaiah 40:31



## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

If you're having trouble finding that place of peace and rest in God's presence, we invite you to receive His Son, Jesus, into your heart. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>3</sup> You can receive Jesus right now by simply praying the following prayer:

*Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me for every wrong and unloving thing I have ever done. Come into my heart, give me Your gift of eternal life, and help me to know Your love and peace. Thank You for hearing and answering this prayer and for being with me always, from this moment on. Amen. ■*

## WINGS OUT OF WEIGHTS

By Virginia Brandt Berg

No matter what obstacles you face in life, there is a way to live above them. God gives His children wings when things get to be too much. Wings are born out of weights.

There's a sort of gravitation in this old world that daily strives to pull us down. But there's also an upward pull that can lift us up to the very heart of God. "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."<sup>4</sup> Those who wait in the Lord's presence, in prayer and in His Word, rise to realms of peace and rest.

When wearied with the strain of it all, fly to God. God has the victory for you. God has the answers to your problems. Fly to God for the rest that He has promised. Fly on the wings of prayer and faith and get the relief that He alone can give you. ■

find peace if we turn to Jesus for His help.—*Marge Banks*

### Peace with those around us

Live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

—*2 Corinthians 13:11*

Jesus gave us the key to happiness and harmony when He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>2</sup> And remember, "neighbor" doesn't only mean the one who lives next door; your neighbor is anyone He brings across your path.—*Alex Peterson*

All works of love are works of peace.

... Peace begins with a smile.

—*Mother Teresa*

### Peace in a world of conflict

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

—*Matthew 5:9 KJV*

Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by a serenity of soul. Peace is not merely an absence of war. It is also a state of mind. Lasting peace can come only to peaceful people.

—*Jawaharlal Nehru*

We look forward to the time

when the power of love will replace the love of power.

Then will our world know the blessings of peace.—*William E. Gladstone*

### Peace with God

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—*Romans 5:1*

"In the fear [reverence] of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge."—*Proverbs 14:26* ■



## SELF-PRESERVATION?

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

I ONCE SAW A TV SHOW SET IN GREAT BRITAIN DURING THE EARLY PART OF WORLD WAR II. The Nazis had defeated France, and the British expected imminent invasion. For some, the uncertainty, the fear of the future, and the feeling that they needed to take care of their own led them to act in ways they wouldn't have in their normal day-to-day lives. They showed less concern for others, many hoarded, others stole, and some even committed murder!

Other people, in contrast, reacted in a completely different manner. They weren't heroic because they performed great deeds; they were heroic because they performed small deeds selflessly. They faced their difficulties with dignity. They helped one another. They banded together as a community, looking out for the welfare of their neighbors and sharing what they had with those in need.

Seeing the contrast between the two types of responses brought home the challenges we face when we are in uncertain times or difficult situations. In times of disorientation, it's natural for people to feel concerned for themselves. While everyone won't respond in the same way, the selfish human instinct for self-preservation takes a more prominent role for some people.

When all around us is unstable, it's natural to become destabilized ourselves. When what felt like solid ground begins to feel like shifting sand, the fear can be gripping.—Fear of the future, fear of the changes being, or about to be, thrust upon us. If we allow fear to overpower faith, our trust in God's care tends to diminish. Once that happens, then the feeling that *we* must take control of events and take matters into our own hands becomes more prominent. This isn't necessarily bad, since the "fight or flight" instinct is built into our nature, and we automatically respond to perceived danger with self-preserving moves.

The challenge we face, though, is finding the right balance between our human nature and our *spiritual* nature. As Christians we are "new creatures" who possess more than just human nature.<sup>1</sup> We have God's Spirit dwelling within us.<sup>2</sup> We abide in Jesus and He abides in us.<sup>3</sup> So, our responses to circumstances and events should be influenced by that indwelling. While we may feel naturally driven toward self-preservation, the Spirit can temper that reaction, so that we can find the balanced response—one which is compatible with Christ's nature.<sup>4</sup>

This isn't easy, because our human nature is so ... well, human. It's our default setting. Being concerned for someone else or their need, situation, or struggle isn't naturally our first priority. Because of this, there is the danger that we will minimize or even completely ignore someone else's needs in favor of our own. Taking care of your needs and the needs of your loved ones isn't wrong. But as disciples of Jesus, filled with the Spirit of Jesus, we should step back from focusing on our own needs and look also to the needs of others. Philippians 2:4–5 says: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup> ■

1. See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

2. See 1 Corinthians 3:16.

3. See John 15:4.

4. See Galatians 5:22–23.

5. NIV

# WHY SUFFERING?



**Question:** Why does God allow suffering? Doesn't He care about us?

**Answer:** God certainly does care! The Bible tells us, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear [reverence] Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus, too, can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was "tempted in every way, just as we are."<sup>2</sup> He certainly knows what it's like to suffer, because He was crucified for the sins of the world.

The Bible promises that someday all the suffering will come to an end for those who love God. In heaven,

God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or pain or crying, because the former things have passed away."<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, we have God's promises of Romans 8:28 that He will work all the things that we face and experience in life for our good in some way. Sorrow, sacrifice, and sadness can bring out the best in us, such as love, empathy, and concern for others. The Bible says, "We comfort others with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."<sup>4</sup> If we have found God's love in Jesus, it gives us the desire to share that answer and love with others, so He can ease their sufferings and help them solve their problems too.

Though we can understand many of the reasons for suffering through reading God's Word, we probably won't know all the answers to this persistent question until we get to heaven. God's ways are not our ways, and there are some things we won't

understand until we see things as God sees them.<sup>5</sup>

The Bible tells us, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."<sup>6</sup> With time our suffering takes on a new perspective. Through it we become a little wiser and a little more compassionate toward others who are suffering.

God has a purpose for everything He allows to happen to us, even though we may not always see it right away. We just have to trust God that if we don't understand now, we will later. And despite our limited knowledge and understanding of some things, there is one thing we can be sure of, and that is His unfailing love.

We will at times be in pain or grieve, but thank God, we are never left hopeless and helpless. "For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life ... nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."<sup>7</sup> ■

1. Psalm 103:13–14 ESV

2. Hebrews 4:15 NIV

3. Revelation 21:4 ESV

4. 2 Corinthians 1:4

5. Isaiah 55:8–9

6. Psalm 30:5

7. Romans 8:38–39



# A REFUGE FROM THE STORM

BY STEVE HEARTS

**IN THE TEMPESTUOUS**, stormy moments of our lives, we often focus so intently on finding a way of escape or rescue that we altogether forget about the most reliable and true source of shelter and refuge.

I was reminded of the many promises in scripture for such times:

“God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea, when its waters roar and rage, when the mountains shake because of its surging waves.”<sup>1</sup>

“I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.”<sup>2</sup>

## GOD’S PROMISES

The Bible is full of promises that God has made—promises that He wants us to apply practically. Some of His promises are universal, like “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”<sup>4</sup> Others were originally made to certain individuals or groups, but they are also available to anyone who applies them to their own similar situation and meets whatever conditions may be attached.

God’s promises are for anyone who has faith enough to believe that God will be true to His word—including you! God means what He has promised, and He will fulfill His promises if you will reach out with the hand of faith. His Word says that He is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”<sup>5</sup>—Virginia Brandt Berg

“The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you.”<sup>3</sup>

None of these promises speak of “rescue” from trouble, although God can and does rescue us according to His will. More important, He is our “refuge” as we go through trials and difficulties. Just as running into a building during a storm does not cause the storm to cease; rather, it provides shelter until the storm runs its course.

With this perspective on storms, we can fully trust and rest in Jesus to be our refuge and shelter for as long as the storm lasts, leaving the final outcome in His hands.

*Dear Jesus, sometimes I feel like the storms of life are overwhelming me, yet You promise I can find refuge in You. Help me to grow in faith, secure in the knowledge that there is never a moment when I am not enveloped by Your love.* ■

1. Psalm 46:1–3 CEB

2. Psalm 57:1 NIV

3. Deuteronomy 33:27 NLT

4. Acts 2:21

5. Ephesians 3:20

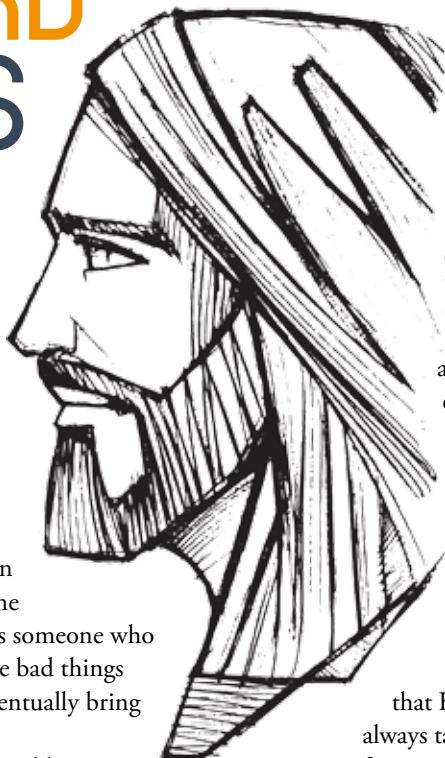
# HOPE IN HARD TIMES

BY MARIA FONTAINE

LIFE IS HARD, there's no question about it. But there is someone you can talk with when decisions seem too hard to make. There is someone you can run to when your heart is breaking and you need a friend to just sit beside you and hold your hand. There is someone who will be there for you in the good times as well as the bad. Not only that, there is someone who has promised to take all the bad things that happen to you and eventually bring good from them.

This is the One who the Bible describes as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”<sup>1</sup>—someone who suffered the greatest of all suffering and who understands your worst emotional and physical pain. He is everything that you could ever want in a friend, a counselor, a guide, and a teacher. He is Jesus, the Son of God.

God’s love is unending, it’s without limits. It’s higher than the highest mountain, deeper than the deepest sea. It’s everywhere, and it’s always, and there’s nothing like it anywhere! It’s all-encompassing, awesome, and



magnificent! It’s far too big for us to fully comprehend.

Jesus is with you all the time, and when you open your heart to Him, you can hear Him speak to you. He wants to be your best friend and to carry on a conversation with you. He is everything good and beautiful, and He can help you to find that goodness and beauty.

If you open your heart to Him and make Him an important part of your life, He will answer you, He will speak to you, He will help you navigate this life. You can find the peace and faith and strength that comes as you trust in Jesus as your best friend.

No matter how difficult things are, you can know that He is right there to help you cope. God doesn’t always take the bad things away, but He can make it easier for you and help you through each difficulty you face.

After you’ve walked with Him through this life, you will be able to keep walking with Him right into the next life in heaven! You will enter the most beautiful place where you will live forever in joy and peace. Love and justice will reign, and you will never be hurt or cheated or oppressed or taken advantage of again. You will never know pain or poverty again.

May you know His all-encompassing love. May you understand how important you are to Him. May you have faith that He is always beside you, and may you have His supernatural joy, no matter what your circumstances. ■

1. Isaiah 53:3 KJV

# YOU CAN RELY ON ME

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE



You can find safety and serenity even in the midst of turmoil, when the proverbial winds of fear blow about you and the currents of worry threaten to sweep you away. That's because I am the author of true peace. You can rely on Me in the middle of any storm, any disaster, any tragedy, or any disease that threatens to harm you or those you love.

I am concerned about every detail of your life. I am here for you even in the midst of difficulty. I want to give you faith and strength, comfort and reassurance. I also wish to help you be a calming influence on others.

Wonderful and supernatural peace, as well as supernatural protection, can be found by calling out to Me. You could pray something like this: "Jesus, I need peace of mind and heart. I need calm and trust in spite of what's happening around me. I need stability. Please keep and protect me and those I care about. Please enter

my heart, my spirit, and my life and fill me with calm, trust, and peace."

If you ask Me, I will give you peace of heart and mind. My love will surround, keep, and care for you in natural and supernatural ways.

I will not only keep you through this present situation, but I will also help you to safely navigate the entire journey of life and all the experiences and tests and personal growth ahead of you while you're on earth. I will take you by the hand and lead you in the ways of truth. I will answer your questions and provide help with your problems.

My love will ensure that you have a blessed passage through life—through all of its ups and downs and twists and turns—until you eventually join Me to live forever in My heavenly realm of eternal peace and love and happiness.

I'm always here for you,  
Jesus