

# See Christ's Face and Feel His Touch

## LHC: Message Ten (980517AM)

### Week 10: See Christ's Face and Feel His Touch

(Revelation 1:16–17)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see Christ's glorious face and feel His powerful touch!

#### SUNDAY: Face-to-face with Jesus

*His Countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*  
—Revelation 1:16

There are so many pictures of Jesus in our minds. From Sunday school lessons to The Jesus Movie, we have countless images that float by us in life. God's Word gives us the only exact picture of Christ's face in the entire universe.

As the apostle John prayed and adored God through His Son, Jesus Christ, he heard a sound and turned—it was *Jesus!* But it was not the Jesus he was used to seeing, or that we think of in pictures and movies. It was the *real Lord Jesus Christ*.

First, John saw Jesus' eyes, which were as flaming fires penetrating like laser beams. Then he heard the voice of Jesus, thunderous and big, bigger than anything on earth. After that he saw His face of glory shining "*like the sun*"—and it changed John's life!

Something fascinating about Jesus and the sun is revealed in the first chapter of Genesis. On the fourth day of creation, God said, "*Let there be lights . . . in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth*"; and it was so. Then God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also (Genesis 1:14–16).

Just by Jesus speaking a few words, the sun suddenly appeared ninety-three million miles out from earth! Isn't that absolutely amazing? It just flamed to life. Traveling at the speed of light, it may have taken about eight minutes for the first warmth and light from the sun to get to the earth. Then the moon started reflecting that light on the backside of the planet. That is phenomenal!

One of the most amazing statements in the Bible is the last five words of verse 16: *He made the stars also*. In that short sentence God describes what scientists cannot comprehend—the limitless expanse of the rest of the universe. Jesus put some of those stars in spiral galaxies, some of them in beautiful filmy nebulae, and others of them in clusters of galaxies. Then he made one hundred billion stars just in our own Milky Way Galaxy. "*He made the stars also*" reads almost like a postscript.

Among those many stars, our sun is an average “yellow” star. It is in the middle as far as size, temperature, and brightness. As you read this, think of what it must have been like for John to see Jesus’ face shining “*like the sun*”:

In the Orion constellation there are two stars of note. Rigel is 15,000 times brighter than our sun, and thus hotter and so on. Antares is 36 million times bigger! At the center, or core of our sun, things are incredibly hot. The atoms stripped of their outer electrons are so densely packed it is absolutely dark and intensely hot. In fact, it is 16 million degrees centigrade.<sup>1</sup>

How hot is “16 million degrees centigrade”? A piece of the sun the size of a pinhead would kill you one hundred miles away because of the heat radiating from it! The energy radiated from the sun in one second is more than all the energy used on the earth since Creation!

So, on a Sunday, 1,900 years ago on Patmos—a barren speck of rock just sixteen miles square and fifteen miles from nowhere in the Mediterranean Sea—John heard a voice and turned and saw the face of Jesus shining like the sun! And what did that do to him? It flattened him: *When I saw him, I fell at His feet as dead* (Revelation 1:17).

What happens when a person comes face-to-face with Christ in all His power and glory? It smites us with an overwhelming sense of our humanity: our fallen nature and our weakness. Do you remember Isaiah’s response when he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and heard the seraphim crying out: “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!*” (Isaiah 6:3)? He said: “*Woe is me, for I am undone! . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*” (Isaiah 6:5).

A face-to-face encounter with Jesus Christ cannot help but strike us with His majesty and His glory. As His creatures, we would want to respond by worshiping Him, and that is exactly what John does. Have you met Jesus face-to-face? Have you responded in heartfelt worship? A genuine encounter with Jesus Christ is life changing!

**My Prayer for You This Week:** *Father in Heaven, from the depth of our beings, from the center of all we are, we want to be found worthy when we stand before You face-to-face; we want to be there clothed in Your righteousness. We don’t know when You are going to come or call us home. It could be that the days written in Your book for us end this week. We pray that we would therefore be those who live for You, Lord Jesus, a life that is true and right. I pray that You, Holy Spirit, will put Your finger into the hearts of each one of us and point out those untoppled idols, those unforsaken sins, those unrestrained areas of flesh in our lives, and that we would say, “Lord, I don’t want to be found living, talking, acting, or doing that in my last moments when You come or call for me.” I pray that we would make those choices while we’re thinking about getting ready to stand before You with all the redeemed, with all the angelic hosts, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” We love You, Lord! Captivate our hearts we pray! In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

## **MONDAY: John Felt the Touch of Christ**

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. **But He laid His right hand on me**, saying to me, “Do not be afraid.”*

—Revelation 1:17, emphasis added

Have you ever considered the power of touch? At this very instant, as you use your senses to read this page, there are five trillion chemical operations occurring each second in your brain. The brain has no contact with the outside world. It is inside an ivory box of bone connected through cables coming up through the spinal column, and from the optical nerve, the auditory nerves, and all the central nervous system—from our touch to our taste. All of these come in and converge in the brain.

Inside our heads all roads lead in from our senses, five gates through which we comprehend the world about us. The capabilities of our senses are impressive! Animals and insects might outdo us in hearing (dog, bat, horse), seeing (eagle), or smelling (moth and salmon), but when our five senses are combined, we are unmatched in our sensory powers.

**Our Sense of Hearing:** How do we distinguish the myriad of sounds we hear? Every distinct sound has a signature of vibrations per second. Our ears can pick out 300,000 different sounds and distinguish between them.

**Our Sense of Smell:** It is with the second sense that we touch our world. Our noses are primitive compared to a salmon's or a moth's, but we can smell one garlic molecule in 50,000 molecules of air and our minds instantly identify what it is from memories of other occurrences. We can discern between 10,000 different odors. And, because God made our sense of smell and **sense of taste** to work together, our ability to smell is what enables us to more fully enjoy the taste of different foods!

**Our Sense of Sight:** It is staggering that God made us with 127 million cells in each eye. Together they could detect a single candle's light at fifteen miles; that is one photon of light to activate our eyes!

**Our Sense of Touch:** This is the strongest of our senses. Just to define "touch" makes it the longest entry in the English language dictionary. No word has more meanings and images. Touch is the sense most alert when we sleep. Is there any human activity that does not vitally rely on touch?

Although scientists cannot agree on how touch works in humans, they can measure it. For instance, one tap of your fingernail can discern between paper, fabric, wood, plastic, or steel. A finger can detect lines etched 1/2500<sup>th</sup> of an inch deep. It can feel even the slightest breeze that is 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of an ounce at the tip of a one-half inch hair. But those sensitivities in us, His creatures, pale in comparison with our Creator's power to sense and feel our touch.

The touch of Jesus is likewise the strongest sense we get of His power. Have you ever pondered the wonderful joy of being touched by Jesus? He reached out and touched the sinners and the sick, the demonized and the defiled, the young and the old, the living and the dead, and the hopeless and the helpless. And all were changed marvelously!

The Gospels record no less than forty times when Jesus touched individuals in His ministry. Some of the most well-known are the **touch of cleansing** a leper (Matthew 8:1–4); the **touch of liberation** for Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14–15); the **touch of completion** as multitudes pressed to touch Him (Matthew 14:36);

the **touch of encouragement** for the astonished disciples (Matthew 17:7); and the **touch of sight** for Bartimaeus and his friend (Matthew 20:34).

Over sixty years after Christ's ascension, as John worshiped Christ that Sunday, he gratefully received Jesus' **touch of perfect love** in His resurrection glory. For *there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18).

Have you experienced the touch of Jesus? His nail-scarred hands are reaching out to touch those who will let Him! Do you *need* the touch of Jesus? He is extending His hand to you, if you will seek Him. **Reach out by faith.** Acknowledge that God senses every fiber of your life. He can feel your needs, and by faith you can touch God. **Ask for His touch.** Only Jesus Christ can fully meet your needs, so you must go to Him. **Confess His work in you.** If He has touched you, you should admit it publicly. Have you touched God today? Has He touched you? Do you need to tell someone?

For more on the wonder of being touched by Jesus, read Mark 5:21–43. Being touched by Him is shown beautifully in that passage. It should encourage you to desire to draw ever nearer to Him through His precious Word!

## **TUESDAY: The Wonder of Being Touched by Jesus**

*Jesus, **moved with compassion**, stretched out His hand and **touched him**, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”*

—Mark 1:41, emphasis added

The wonder of being touched by Jesus is clearly seen in Mark where some, like the grateful leper in 1:41, were touched by God in a mighty way. Ponder this familiar setting in Mark: *When Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea* (5:21). Now use your senses to relive the scene:

- **Feel** the rough-hewn, handmade boat, as it lay weathered on the shore.
- **See** the sun glinting off the blue-green waters of the Sea of Galilee.
- **Smell** the thick smells of fish, weeds, and wetness blended with the odors of a time when people seldom bathed.
- **Hear** the presence of numberless multitudes that swarmed around Christ like flies.
- **Taste** the excitement as they pressed upon Him so much that He couldn't get through them; so He stayed on the shore.

Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum, crashed through the crowd that had been pressing upon Jesus. As he caught sight of Christ, he *fell at His feet* (Mark 5:22)! Oh, to have that great a desire to meet with Jesus! Have you ever felt like crashing through the crowd at your church to dive at the feet of Christ—to delight in looking for Him in His Word? That is why these people experienced Him so deeply.

With complete faith, the ruler earnestly begged Jesus to come and heal his daughter: *“My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live”* (Mark 5:23b). So *Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him* (Mark 5:24).

During this time, everyone was still trying to touch Jesus, even if it was just the bottom of His robe. At this point an unknown, withered woman who had been aged by a horrible uncleanness *came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment*. For she knew that Jesus alone was her hope: *“If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well”* (Mark 5:27–28).

Her *flow of blood for twelve years* made her unclean in the eyes of Levitical law. She *had suffered many things from many physicians and had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse* (Mark 5:25–26). This woman was ashamed of her uncleanness. The bleeding woman knew, as do Christians today, that Jesus alone can meet our deepest needs.

The dying woman was motivated by faith; she touched Christ, and instantly was healed of her affliction. Do you remember the sensitivity of the five senses? She *intuitively* knew that her affliction was gone. Then Jesus, *immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched My clothes?”* (see Mark 5:30, emphasis added).

What would that moment have been like? Picture being at the Rose Bowl in California for the Olympic Games, with all 100,000 people leaving at once after the games. You would be in an ocean of bodies! Can you imagine one person in that crowd saying, “Who just touched me?” It would have been a joke!

Jesus Christ is the only One who could feel the trembling, withered hand of a dying woman’s touch upon the tassel of His coat. He alone can truly feel your heart’s cry right now, and He has the power to make you whole! If you or a loved one fear death, or are desperate, helpless, sick, or feel unable to go any further, come to Jesus for help!

You have seen two people who had needs: Jairus, who came to Jesus for the healing of his daughter, and the aged woman, who came to Jesus to be healed of her “*flow of blood*.” They came in two ways, but both had to confess Jesus publicly. Perhaps you need to be honest before others as well. Have you ever confessed to the church that God has touched you and made you whole? If not, you should do so through baptism, which is public confession—it will change your spiritual life!

### WEDNESDAY: Jesus’ Greatest Touch

*She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”*

—John 8:11, emphasis added

In Week 5, I briefly touched on the loveliest picture I know of Christ’s forgiveness—the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. Her story, recorded for us in John 8:1–11, represents one of the most beautiful portraits of the greatest touch of Jesus, His complete cleansing and forgiveness.

As you read this retelling of that incredible moment in Christ’s ministry, watch for the contrasts between man’s touch and Jesus’ touch; man’s countenance and Jesus’ countenance; man’s tone of voice and Jesus’ tone of voice; man’s lack of mercy and Jesus’ mercy. Who would you rather face?

John 8 opens early in the morning in the wide spaces of the Temple courtyard where Jesus often taught, and crowds often gathered to hear Him. As the sun rose higher and coolness of the dawn began to melt away Jesus was seated and holding the complete attention of a growing crowd. Suddenly the sound of an angry mob shatters the quietness of Christ's message.

Surging forward are well known religious leaders, both Scribes and Pharisees. They push their way roughly through those who listened to Christ and drag a woman forward. She is dazed, unkempt, weeping and limp as they cast her in a heap at Christ's feet.

With voices of hatred, eyes of contempt, and faces hard as stone the accusation they brought is hurled at Christ like a spear. This woman was guilty of adultery; they were the witnesses—and she should be stoned. Silently Jesus took in the situation. The sobbing woman lay in a heap at His feet, like a garbage bag on the curb. The accusers were so much like their Father the Devil, who is an accuser and destroyer, just like them. Then Jesus looked at the crowd. How they needed to understand the depth of redeeming love and forgiving grace.

Jesus began to look around the circle of the accusing religious leaders, His eyes began to pierce their souls. The hatred boiling over in their souls began to burn them within. It seemed as if Jesus were looking into their minds and hearts—and they felt instantly undone before Him. The accusers felt accused, and the accused felt protected.

Then suddenly the silence was broken. Christ's admirers and haters all were now captivated by the One who spoke and acted like no one ever had done. He got down in front of the cast off bit of humanity that had been tossed at His feet. On her level he knelt and began to slowly trace letters in the dust of the marble floors. This is the only time the Gospels record Jesus writing anything—but those who watched will never forget what they felt. Starting at the oldest Jesus wrote a word, and then gazed into each of their eyes. Perhaps it was the word *pride* or *lust* or *greed* or *liar*, but no matter what He wrote the effect was always the same. The touch of Jesus' eyes made them blanch with a shudder of unearthly fear, they dropped the rock they had clutched and with downcast eyes fled Christ's presence. The other accusers couldn't stop watching and trembling as they each faced a personal Judgment Day before the Judge of All.

There is the thud of stone after stone falling on the pavement. Not many of the Pharisees are left. One by one, they creep away—like animals slinking into the shadows . . . shuffling off into the crowded streets to lose themselves in the multitudes.

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." But no stones have been thrown. They lie around the woman on the pavement. They have dropped them where they stood, and now she is left alone at the feet of Christ.

Only her sobbing breaks the stillness. She still has not lifted her head . . . And now Christ looks at her. He does not speak for a long moment. Then, with eyes full of understanding, He says softly: "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" (John 8:10) And she answers, "No man, Lord."

That is all the woman says from beginning to end. She has no excuse for her conduct. She makes no attempt to justify what she has done.

And Christ, looking at her, seeing the tear-stained cheeks and her eyes red with weeping, seeing further into her heart, seeing the contrition there, says to her: “**Neither do I condemn you**; go and sin no more.” (John 8:11, emphasis added).

What He says here is—Not that He acquits the woman, but that He forgives her. Not that He absolves her from blame, but that He absolves her from guilt. Not that He condones the act, but that He does not condemn her for it—He forgives her instead.

Perhaps He smiles upon her, as she slowly raises her eyes, a slow, sad smile of One who knew that He himself has to pay the price of that absolution. And it may be that His finger writes again in the dust, tracing this time the outline of a cross or the shape of a hill—a hill shaped like a skull.

No, we do not know her name, or where she lived, or who she was. But of this we can be sure—she was never the same again. She was a changed woman from that moment. Of that we can be sure.”<sup>2</sup>

God is willing to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, because the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin! The woman caught in adultery was never the same after she experienced Jesus’ touch in her life! Have you received His touch—His greatest gift ever?

## **THURSDAY: Life in the Minor Key**

*We were **troubled on every side**. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us.*

—2 Corinthians 7:5–6, emphasis added

Most of the Bible is in the major key in which saints are fearlessly witnessing and churches are valiantly serving against all odds. As much as those portions bring great joy to our souls, side-by-side with all that wonderful testimony is the minor key of Scripture.

In the minor key accounts, God provides true glimpses into His children’s weaknesses and frailties by showing how some of His greatest saints struggled with being sad, discouraged, and depressed. Yet the Lord did not correct them and tell them they were in sin. So, as we study Revelation’s unveiling of the Great Tribulation coming upon this world, know that He understands if at times you struggle with anticipation of what is to come. He wants you to give your fears to Him and find living hope for the end of days!

I believe that having a better understanding of God’s view of depression can encourage your heart. Think about these questions: Is it always sin that *makes* us depressed? Is it always a sin to be depressed? It may surprise you that God’s answer to both questions is no. What do Moses, Elijah, Hezekiah, Job, Ezra, David, Jeremiah, Jonah, and Paul share in common with us today? They were all Spirit-filled servants of the Lord, and they all struggled with negative emotions.

I looked up *depression* in the *Webster’s Dictionary* and found the descriptions fascinating: “(1) A state of feeling sad; a disorder marked especially by sadness,

inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal tendencies; and (2) A reduction in activity, amount, quality, or force; a lowering of vitality or functional activity.”

We must be careful to not say that anxiety, depression, discouragement, and other negative emotions are in themselves sinful. Why? God’s servants have experienced these same emotions, and in Christ we see sinless anger, deep emotional distress, grief, and anguish—all of which were perfectly displayed. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus *“began to be very distressed and troubled”* and His soul was *“deeply grieved to the point of death”* (see Mark 14:33–34 NASB). In coming to earth, He took upon himself the form of a human with all its frailties, yet He did not sin.

We should not call each occurrence of a negative emotion sin, but neither should we stay “in the pits.” The following servants of the Lord all suffered from crippling, and sometimes even paralyzing, depression:

- **Moses:** *“I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now!”* (Numbers 11:14–15).
- **Elijah:** *“But he . . . prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’ ”* (1 Kings 19:4).
- **Hezekiah:** *Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD. . . . And Hezekiah wept bitterly* (2 Kings 20:2–3).
- **Job:** *“Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?”* (Job 3:11).
- **Ezra:** *My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word* (Psalm 119:25).
- **David:** *“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name”* (Psalm 142:7).
- **Jeremiah:** *“See, O LORD, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious”* (Lamentations 1:20).
- **Jonah:** *God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he . . . said, “It is better for me to die than to live”* (Jonah 4:8).
- **Paul:** *Our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us* (2 Corinthians 7:5–6, NASB).

When caught up in the throes of depression, emotions can run so rampant that it is difficult to think clearly. If that happens to you, like David, remember to cry out to the Lord: *O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge; until these calamities have passed by* (Psalm 57:1). Jesus is the safest refuge in the universe!



## FRIDAY: Temptation and Struggles Are Not Sin

[Paul and Barnabus] **strengthen[ed] the souls** of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

—Acts 14:22, emphasis added

Yesterday we looked at various notable saints in the Bible who suffered from crippling, and sometimes paralyzing, depression. Now we’re going to look at a few examples of God’s choice servants who have likewise suffered in this manner. It may surprise you to learn that Martin Luther was among those who’ve struggled with depression.

The great hymn we all love to sing, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, was penned by the great sixteenth-century reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546)—during his darkest days of depression. It was a testimony to God’s power to lift him out of the prison of his soul, back to hope and strength.

As a devoted pastor, he sought to bring spiritual counsel to struggling souls. His compassion for those souls shines in numerous places, including his sermons, lectures, Bible commentaries and table talks.<sup>3</sup>

Besides observing mental difficulties in others, Luther had a greater reason to affirm their reality—he also endured many periods of depression. He described his personal experience in varied terms: melancholy, heaviness, and depression; dejection of spirit, downcast, sad, and downhearted. He suffered this way for much of his life and often revealed these struggles in his works. Luther evidently did not think it a shameful problem to be hidden.

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), who lit the fires of the nineteenth-century revival movement, struggled so severely with depression that he was forced to be absent from his pulpit for two to three months a year. In 1866 he told his congregation: “I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.” Those words were spoken in a sermon by Spurgeon whose marvelous ministry in London made him perhaps the greatest preacher England ever produced.

Dr. John Henry Jowett (1864–1923) pastored leading churches, preached to huge congregations, and wrote books that were best-sellers. In a message he confessed: “You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky.” Yet Dr. Jowett was often called in his day: “The Greatest Preacher in the English-speaking World!”

I could go on and on through the “Who’s Who” of ministry and find countless other testimonies that say the same. The point is this: Spirit-filled Christians can experience emotional problems. Some godly believers, especially those of certain temperaments, will always struggle with feeling “down.”

As we look back on history, we can conclude that many of these saints suffered because of physical conditions that prompted depression. One Christian medical doctor, who has spent his lifetime helping people, writes this:

Consider this thought experiment. Give me the most saintly person you know. If I were to administer certain medications of the right dosage, such as thyroid hormone, or insulin, I could virtually guarantee that I could make this saint anxious with at least one of these agents. Would such chemically induced anxiety be explained as a spiritual sin? What if the person's own body had an abnormal amount of thyroid hormone or insulin and produced nervousness?<sup>4</sup>

We as believers should never condone willful sin, but we must learn to accept that some fellow believers may suffer from emotional symptoms that are not the result of unconfessed sin. It is possible to feel horrible, and be in great emotional anguish, and still be obedient to the Lord.

Consider what godly Job cried out in the midst of his suffering: *“For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. . . . My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. . . . I despise my life. . . . Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. . . . But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. . . . And now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest. . . . I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer”* (Job 3:24; 7:6, 16; 16:7; 23:8; 30:16–17, 20; NIV).

Notice that in spite of Job's depression, the Bible says, *In all this Job did not sin* (1:22 NIV). Moreover, God reproved his friends for accusing him of sin and for their failure to speak rightly concerning His servant (see 42:7–8). We must never forget: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Proverbs 18:21). So when we notice that a sister or brother in Christ is struggling with depression, we must be careful to not be judgmental but to be an encourager instead!

## **SATURDAY: Share Struggles—Share Prayers**

*You also **helping together** in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.*

—2 Corinthians 1:11, emphasis added

The word *sunopourgeo*, translated *“helping together,”* is used only here in the Greek New Testament and is composed of three words: “with, under, work.” It is a picture of laborers under the burden, working together to get the job accomplished. Paul enlists the help of other believers to hold him up in his emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles. (This was in addition to the Holy Spirit's promise in Romans 8:26 to assist us in our praying and help carry our load.)

Difficulties, especially in these end days, should draw us closer to other Christians as we share our burdens and prayer needs. When experiencing the trials of life, we need to remember what God has promised us, and what He has commanded us to do.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, there are more imperative commands than in any other paragraph in God's Word. It is one of the clearest descriptions of the basic duties of a believer in Christ's church. In verses 11–26, we are commanded:

- Comfort each other.

- Edify one another.
- Be at peace among yourselves.
- Warn those who are unruly.
- Uphold the weak.
- Be patient with all.
- See that no one renders evil.
- Always pursue what is good.
- Rejoice always.
- Pray without ceasing.
- In everything give thanks.
- Do not quench the Spirit.
- Do not despise prophecies.
- Test all things.
- Hold fast to what is good.
- Abstain from every form of evil.

In other words, we must take seriously Paul's command to *comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all* (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

**Make a choice to live in hope:** What can depression, discouragement, and faintheartedness do for us? If we choose to live in hope, as we regularly cry out to the Lord, it can inspire us to some of the deepest and greatest discoveries about God we can ever make!

In perhaps his deepest depression, Martin Luther wrote one of Christendom's greatest hymns. In 1527 he wrote: "For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost."

Here is Luther's testimony about the great discoveries he made about God during his lengthy periods of being in melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit, downcast, sad, and downhearted:

### **A Mighty Fortress Is Our God**

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing;  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own  
choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth is His Name, from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo  
us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through  
us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;*

*His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.*

—Martin Luther (1483–1546)

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<sup>1</sup> *Our Amazing World of Nature* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Books, 1969), pp. 261–63.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter: The Story of Peter Marshall* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), pp. 310–19.

<sup>3</sup> See Preserved Smith, *Luther's Table Talk* (New York: Ames Press, 1907) for a critical study of the table talks.

<sup>4</sup> Dwight L. Carlson, "Exposing the Myth that Christians Should Not Have Emotional Problems," *Christianity Today* (February 9, 1998).