

**LIVING WITH
CONFIDENCE IN A
CHAOTIC WORLD**

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

CERTAIN HOPE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

**DR. DAVID
JEREMIAH**



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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction: Knowing the Signs</i>	VII
1 Stay Calm	1
2 Stay Compassionate	20
3 Stay Constructive	43
4 Stay Challenged	67
5 Stay Connected	90
6 Stay Centered	113
7 Stay Confident	135
8 Stay Consistent	158
9 Stay Committed	180
10 Stay Convinced	202
<i>Afterword: One More Thing</i>	223
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	229
<i>Notes</i>	231

INTRODUCTION

Knowing the Signs

In June 2020—smack in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic—the tiny nation of Fiji in the South Pacific made a tempting proposition to a very small number of people around the globe.

Frank Bainimarama, Fiji's prime minister, announced he was looking for a few "VIPs" to shelter in paradise during the outbreak and help restore his nation's economy.

"Say you're a billionaire looking to fly your own jet, rent your own island, and invest millions of dollars in Fiji in the process," wrote Bainimarama. "If you've taken all the necessary health precautions and borne all associated costs, you may have a new home to escape the pandemic in paradise."¹

What a proposal! Unfortunately, there are only about two thousand billionaires on the planet,² which is one reason why you and I have been forced to endure the various catastrophes of recent years rather than escape them.

And we have encountered many disrupting events, even beyond the global pandemic that stopped so much of our "regular" lives in their tracks so quickly. We've seen economic collapse and financial despair. We've seen fires ravaging the western United States,

INTRODUCTION

earthquakes shaking the foundations of cities around the world, and hurricanes and floods destroying homes and taking lives. We've seen violence in the streets and cries of injustice across communities. And as I write this, the United States is a month away from an election that has already caused more division and strife than any in recent memory.

Had enough? Me too.

There have been tumultuous times in the past as well. Remember World War I, Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the atomic bomb, the revolutions of the 1960s, and the fall of the Berlin Wall? Remember 9/11, the more recent wars in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and the war on terror? Remember the economic downfall in 2008? There is no doubt we have encountered political unrest and worldwide disease and economic failure in the past, but I would suggest that there's never been a time in our collective memory like this current moment—the world is in turmoil.

But don't be discouraged when difficult days seemingly surround us. Just before Jesus Christ returns to earth, keeping the promise He made to His disciples, the Bible says a troubling time will arrive. And, my friends, it's quite possible that we have entered the early stages of those events.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, we are told: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3).

As I think about that passage, I find myself observing how that metaphor about labor pains perfectly fits the headlines I've

VIII

INTRODUCTION

been reading. An expectant mother endures quite a trial as she prepares for the birth of her child. She has morning sickness, she goes through all kinds of other drastic bodily changes, and then the labor pains arrive. As that child prepares to enter the world, the mother's discomfort is amplified—it's a message that God doesn't want her to miss. *Rejoice! Your child is on the way!*

Similarly, our world is in pain even now. We will feel it as the nations quake. Yet we can cry out, "*Rejoice! Your redemption is near!*" This pain, this confusion, this anxiety is only for a little while longer.

Let's return to that frightening term *catastrophe*. It's an odd four-syllable word, isn't it? In fact, it represents the union of two Greek words: *cata*, meaning "over," and *strophe*, meaning "to turn." The full picture is one of overthrow, of everything turning over in sudden and violent change.

You and I have experienced that kind of change, that kind of violence—the world turning over in chaotic spasms. And each time we experience it anew, we are confronted with that same critical question: "Is there any way to live with confidence in a chaotic world?"

It's a question we need to answer. You see, we no longer have the luxury of sitting back in our recliners, stroking our chins, and examining this spectacle from some distance. Because of our increasingly connected world, we are now all players in global events. When one nation struggles, we all struggle. When yet another catastrophe strikes, we're all affected.

We need a plan, and we need one as quickly as possible.

Thankfully, we can find that plan within the pages of God's Word. As I have scoured the books of the New Testament, I discovered ten practical strategies to help us live with confidence in a

INTRODUCTION

chaotic world. Each one assures us of Christ's return and shows us how to live until then. What a blessing it is to know the right way to respond when our challenges exceed our courage!

As we face the uncertainty of our troubled generation, we cannot afford to turn away from the priceless counsel of the Word of God. We need it more than ever because it provides a firm foundation even when the world seems in the grip of quicksand's undertow.

I feel the anxiety of these times, but I also draw profound peace from the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples—that includes you and me—in the Upper Room. He told them that He would never leave them without comfort: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:26–27).

In those words I can hear Jesus speaking to our generation. He assured us that we do not need to live in fear, no matter what the headlines say. Jobs can be lost, homes can be destroyed, but the love of Christ is forever. Understanding that truth calms our spirits and allows us to begin thinking—really thinking—about the new world around us.

As we work through the ten chapters of this book together, I pray that you will see your own circumstances with new eyes and that you will look within yourself, finding new courage not in your own strength or skills, but in the unlimited resources of Christ, in whom we can do all things.

Then, as we finish these pages, we won't be tempted by the promise of escape—not even to our own private island in some

INTRODUCTION

faraway paradise. No, in the midst of it all we can place our trust in the promises, power, and love of almighty God, and we *can* live with confidence in an age of chaos.

—David Jeremiah
San Diego, CA
October 2020

CHAPTER 1

STAY CALM

Funny how it never rains in Beijing when American presidents arrive for high-profile visits. It's no coincidence. Military meteorologists in China seed the clouds and empty them of their moisture in advance.¹ The weather is tailor-made for the occasion. That's why the skies were picture-perfect for the opening ceremonies of the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics. Using an arsenal of rockets, artillery, and aircraft, Chinese scientists blasted the clouds right out of the sky. "We can turn a cloudy day into a dry and sunny one," boasted Miam Donglian of the Beijing weather bureau.²

That's nothing compared to what's coming. Weather modification is a rapidly developing technology, spurred on by billion-dollar investments in climate change and global warming. It's a new science, and its ramifications aren't lost on military planners. Secret laboratories in military installations around the globe are developing what may be the most underreported arms race on earth: weather warfare.

Many military and environmental scientists believe we can learn to use powerful chemicals and electromagnetic scalar waves to manipulate and control short-term weather patterns in ways that can alter the world's balance of power.

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

When we read about such ideas, we feel like we're either hurtling into the age of science fiction or stepping into the pages of the book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible indicates that catastrophic disruptions in the earth's meteorological patterns will wreak havoc on the world during the Great Tribulation.

But here's what I want you to know: as we await the Lord's return, the atmospherics of your heart and mine should be calm. The Bible says we have a God who calms the storm and a Savior who rebukes the wind and waves so they are calm (Psalm 107:29; Luke 8:24). The writer of Psalm 131 said, "Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul" (v. 2). Proverbs 17:27 tells us that a person of understanding has a calm spirit; and in Isaiah 7:4, the Lord told us, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart" (NIV).

Calm is an interesting word that is known more for what it is not: agitation, fear, or turbulence. But "calm" does require some kind of storm or we would never notice it. The weather world gave us the word in the first place. It means wind that is moving one mile per hour or less. The Beaufort scale has "Calm" at one end and "Hurricane" at the other—extreme opposites.

Take a moment and evaluate your own life. As you attempt to move through these chaotic days, where would the Beaufort scale register the winds of your soul?

A June 2020 American Psychological Association poll indicated that 83 percent of us believe the future of our nation is a significant source of stress. That figure represented a rise of seventeen percentage points in only twelve months!³

One industry is actually doing very well: pharmaceutical medicines for anxiety. I've read claims that more than forty million Americans suffer from enough anxiety and depression to need medication.⁴ While this may represent a wise option in cases of

STAY CALM

clinical stress, there are deeper causes for panic attacks and anxiety that medication will never penetrate.

Perhaps this is a good time to remember why I wrote this book and why you have chosen to read it. We are trying to determine what on earth we should be doing in these stressful times. And we have discovered that God has given us solid answers to our questions in the very passages that tell us of His Son's return to earth.

In this chapter, and in every chapter that follows it, I have identified instructions for living life while we are looking for the Savior. I can find no better resource for our troubled days than His example. Jesus, for instance, spoke to His disciples about His purposes after leaving earth. Here is how He began: "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1). He would not have said these calming words unless His followers needed them. Their hearts were troubled; He knows that ours are too. Each one of us has a different "anxiety quotient."

Some people believe that when they accept Christ, they will receive a Get Out of Stress Free card and live a life of uninterrupted bliss. To be honest, when I became a believer, I picked up a few new problems I hadn't had before. Jesus never offered a false promise. At every point, He warned us that troubles would follow our path and that obedience to Him would actually increase our persecution. But He is also the one who said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me *you may have peace*. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, emphasis added).

Jesus Himself felt pressure. He was distressed as He watched Mary weep over the death of her brother Lazarus. He "groaned in the spirit and was troubled" (John 11:33). As He contemplated the cross, He felt genuine anxiety (John 12:27). As He waited for Judas

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

to betray Him, He was troubled (John 13:21). He is a high priest who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15).

As the death of our Lord Jesus came near, His disciples began to be anxious about their life situations, and Jesus comforted them with these words:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:1–6)

THE ULTIMATE IN COMFORT

We need to return to this passage whenever we are besieged by worry. Remember, Jesus didn’t say these words as He stood beside a Galilean stream on a sunny day, without a care in the world. He said them as He stood near the jaws of hell itself. He didn’t speak from the all-protective shelter of His Father’s arms. He sat with His frightened disciples in the Upper Room, preparing for the worst of humanity and the silence of heaven. His words were, “Let not your heart be troubled.”

It encourages me to realize that He faced what He did, felt the worst of what we would feel, and still drew enough strength

STAY CALM

to comfort others. He looked at His friends and felt compassion for them. These were men He had asked to follow Him. For three years He had been their life. Then He had begun to speak of leaving them. In John 13, He had told them that the time was drawing near for Him to leave, and that this time they would not be able to follow Him. Peter asked Him exactly where He was going. Jesus told him again that it was a place to which he could not come until sometime in the future (John 13:36).

This conversation would have been terribly upsetting for the disciples who had depended on Jesus for everything. Our Lord's words of encouragement to His close friends were preserved by the apostle John so that they are available to give comfort to us as well. Jesus gave His disciples some things to believe, things to hold on to. He asked them to put their trust in four things that He promised would provide courage and renewed strength for their troubled hearts. I think you will discover as you read the following pages that these timeless truths are just what you and I need in these chaotic days.

JESUS ASKS US TO BELIEVE IN A PERSON

When a child is afraid during the night, who but a parent can provide comfort? The child will cling to Mommy or Daddy and begin to feel calm. That's how it is with Jesus. His comfort begins with His very identity. "Let not your heart be troubled," He told us. "You believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

The people of Judea believed in one God. The center of their faith was expressed in the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). These Jewish followers of Jesus had been trained since infancy to love God exclusively. Now Jesus was telling them something shocking; He wanted them to believe in Him in the exact same way—because He was God’s Son. If the divine nature of Jesus is difficult for us to understand, you can imagine how the disciples would have struggled to wrap their minds around such an idea. In fact, it wasn’t until after His resurrection that they began to process what He was telling them.

Jesus was asking people who had been schooled in the Hebrew Scripture to expand their faith in their heavenly Father to include His Son, their earthly teacher. Calling on His full authority as the Lord of heaven and earth, He said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30 NIV). To believe in what Jesus says, you must believe who He is.

JESUS ASKS US TO BELIEVE IN A PLACE

Next Jesus told His disciples, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

A man takes a new job in another city. He is in the process of moving his family to a brand-new home there, but he must travel ahead of them and start his work earlier. His child cries because he will be gone for a week, but the father stoops, pulls him into an embrace, and says, “I’ll be there getting your new room ready. You’re going to have a place to ride your bicycle, and I’ll be starting on that tree house we’re going to build.” The tears dry as the child sees all this in his mind.

STAY CALM

That's a picture of what Jesus was doing here. He encouraged His disciples to think of the wonderful future He planned for them.

The Scriptures include many synonyms for heaven. We know it is vast, we know it is beautiful and wonderful beyond all imagining. We know it is a country, one about which our most gorgeous earthly landscapes are only rough drafts. It is, in another way, a magnificent city, built and perfected by the architect of this universe. Then we can think of it as a kingdom, the realm of the powerful king. Heaven is also called *paradise*, a word suggesting its supreme beauty.

Those metaphors are beautiful pictures of our future home, but Jesus' description of heaven is my favorite: "My Father's house." We know what that means. Many of us had favorite grandparents we visited. We think, *This is where Dad was a little boy. This is my father's house!* It holds a special charm and wonder for us, associated with Christmas, joy, and laughter. I like to think of heaven that way.

There was a special house where I grew up. My parents, as they grew older, finally moved away from it, and that was hard for me to take. I hadn't lived there for some time, but the house symbolized my whole past, my first memories, my childlike innocence and security. It was part of me.

Praise God, He never decides to move to a smaller home. There is ultimate security in the eternal nature of heaven. Author Thomas Wolfe wrote a book called *You Can't Go Home Again*, but there is one home we can never lose or leave. Christ has gone there to prepare it for us, and that gives us comfort.

Heaven is real. Cloud-and-golden-gate-laden cartoons, movies, and jokes have reduced heaven to a stereotype. We need to realize just what is being stolen from the sanctified imagination when this precious image is made trivial to us. We are not yet in heaven, but it has power for us right now. It extends its hope to us. It guides

our aspirations. It soothes our hearts when we lose a loved one. And when we think of its eventuality, we realize there is nothing mundane or insignificant about any of us—we are children of the kingdom; we are bound for heaven! It is real, and it is home.

About Those Mansions

Many of us are familiar with the phrase “many mansions,” as we learned it in our King James Bibles. Newer translations substitute something like “many rooms” or “many dwelling places.” The explanation is that this word, now associated with the homes of millionaires, originally meant a simple dwelling place. Jesus was actually saying, “In my Father’s house are many rooms.” But please don’t think we’ll all be tenants of a large boarding house, with cramped quarters and a shared bathroom down the hall. Heaven is the infinite expanse of God’s glory; it is perfection, and the idea of a mansion is more than appropriate.

This language of an ultimate home is a powerful balm to the heart. Home means something different to every person, but it’s a longing we all share. Home, no matter how humble, is the place where we begin life. It is the place we must inevitably leave to build an adult life. And the yearning to recapture that basic security and sense of belonging remains in us. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has set eternity in our hearts, and that’s heaven, our ultimate home.

On one occasion, Dr. Paul Tournier, the brilliant Swiss Christian medical doctor, counseled a young man from a troubled home situation. “Basically, I’m always looking for a place—for somewhere to be,” said the man. Tournier explained that each of us longs for a true home.⁵

You can see this longing throughout history. The first thing people do upon becoming substantially wealthy is build their “dream

STAY CALM

home.” In some cases they’ve become consumed by this quest. In the nineteenth century, King Ludwig II of Bavaria nearly bankrupted his German nation by building palace after palace. He had to be removed from power, and his greatest castle remained incomplete.⁶

In the United States, two palatial houses qualify as “castles.” North Carolina has the Biltmore House while California has its Hearst Castle. The Biltmore House has over 250 rooms, including 35 bedrooms and 43 bathrooms. George Washington Vanderbilt II nearly depleted his incredible fortune in completing the estate, then died after only a few years of enjoying it. The home of William Randolph Hearst has a mere 165 rooms, with 127 acres of gardens, terraces, pools, and walkways. Again, a heart attack took the founder before he could enjoy the fruit of his labor. In both cases, tourists have come out as the true winners.

Today we have every kind of television show about homes and making them perfect. The yearning never dies. But no matter how luxurious a palace we build, no matter how much we spend, we can’t take it with us, nor will any moat or drawbridge keep death from the front door. These architectural obsessions simply prove our longing for the one and only home that will be enjoyed throughout eternity. Can you imagine living in the Biltmore House or Hearst Castle? Beside the home Jesus is preparing, either would seem like a run-down toolshed.

What Makes a Home?

There will be some readers who have lost their homes, or come close to it, because of financial catastrophes. I realize this subject is a sensitive one for you, and I don’t wish to cheapen the loss you’ve experienced with trite assurances. Even so, I truly believe that God can help you experience the reality of your eternal home, and in that

LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

way give you comfort and reassurance. We must remember that a house is not a home, any more than the church is a building. A true home is an intangible thing, composed of love, relationships, and peace. Heaven may be like a mansion or a billion mansions—but no ornamentation or architecture will make it precious to us. Only the presence of our Lord will do that.

As we continue to explore what on earth we should be doing now, let us not forget about our Lord's words concerning heaven.

None of us knows what the future holds for our own crisis. My prayer for you is that you come through your crisis strong. This can be a time of maturity for all of us, helping us to understand that we are not citizens of this world and that we cannot place our faith in any of its establishments or institutions. As we await His return, we trust Him to care for our every need, and we remember that Jesus himself said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

Do we really long for that ultimate and eternal home, rather than simply a place to lay our heads? C. S. Lewis wrote that sometimes it seems as if we have no desire for heaven at all; other times, it seems to him we've never desired anything else. In truth, he said, our yearning for heaven is "the secret signature of each soul." It is the thing we have desired all along and will continue to desire, even when we don't realize it's the thing we most want.⁷

JESUS ASKS US TO BELIEVE IN A PROMISE

A particularly wonderful aspect of the Bible is its many promises. When God makes a promise, it is our rock. Jesus comforted us with

STAY CALM

this promise: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

Some interpret this as a description of what happens when we die. The problem is that we have no specific scriptural support for the idea of Christ returning for each believer at death. Luke 16:22 suggests that the angels handle that task. No, this verse is certainly a description of the triumphant return of Christ. Our comfort is in looking forward to His return, when He will take us away from all the problems and heartbreaks of this life.

What I have just said is certainly nothing that hasn't been said countless times before. I doubt it's the first time it's been expressed to you in similar wording. And yet it is the most profound statement in all of history. Here is the very heart of Jesus' message to His troubled disciples. The deepest, most far-reaching truth in the entire universe is not expressed in any of Einstein's laws but in a children's song that goes, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” It's nothing new, but it's the best news you'll ever hear! How much different would our lives be if we could only begin to embrace the truth that the God of heaven desires to spend eternity with us?

Listen to our Lord as He put this desire into prayer: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

We need our Lord's promise as we continue to walk the uncharted roads of our current moment. We might lose our jobs or our homes or even our lives—the Devil may win the battle—but Christ has already won the war.

In the darkest days of the Second World War, as defeated