



"Without courage, all other virtues lose their meaning."
—Winston S. Churchill

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Great Expectations

We live in the most prosperous society that humanity has ever known. The average American lives better than kings and emperors did throughout history. Our modest homes shelter us better than castles and palaces of ancient times, and our automobiles whisk us to and fro faster and more comfortably than any carriage, chariot or other wheeled conveyance of the past.

We not only eat three meals each day, but we have a vast variety of foods from which to choose, from all over the globe. We rarely wear our clothing out but throw or give it away when we grow tired of it. Most of us can find employment when we want it, and our wages frequently include paid vacations, investment and retirement benefits, and various additional perks. Our senior years, though they may not allow us to live sumptuously, are cushioned by investments, pensions and Social Security payments. Besides that, we have the luxury of an average lifespan of about 75 years, about twice that of most people historically.

Do we really have cause to complain? Can any of us truly claim to be victims of "hard times?" When the economy falters and our personal standard of living begins to dip, are we really that bad off—or is it that we expect more than we are due? Have we tuned into Satan's broadcast of attitudes of discontent and discouragement instead of God's reassuring pledge that everything will work out for the good of the called who [love](#) Him ([Romans 8:28](#))?

Our expectations in this life far outstrip our needs. Compared to earlier times, our lifestyle—even during depressions—is far superior to what most people enjoyed in good

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times in the past:

- Do we live hand to mouth?
- Does our work involve backbreaking labor from dawn to dusk?
- Are the clothes on our backs our only possessions?
- Is walking our only form of transportation?
- Do we give all but a pittance of our hard-earned wages to our landlord?
- Do we expect to die an old man or woman at forty?
- Have half of our children died before they reached puberty?
- Do we have no voice whatever on any matter, governmental, religious or social?

But does not [God](#) promise us more than this? True, those who live under God's way of life rarely endure such appalling conditions, but does He truly promise us the good life? It is difficult—rather, impossible—to find such a blanket promise in Scripture! If we live according to God's law, we will reap its blessings, particularly in spiritual areas. [Jesus](#) Himself assures us only of drink, food and clothing ([Matthew 6:25-33](#)). God does not promise employment, a vehicle, a vacation, a mate, a house, a television, a microwave oven, or even [peace](#)! To the contrary, He says through Paul, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer [persecution](#)" ([II Timothy 3:12](#))! This hardly qualifies as comforting!

Peter writes: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" ([I Peter 4:12](#)). Paul agrees: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man" ([I Corinthians 10:13](#)). God uses trial and temptation—tests of our faith—to see what we are made of, to see just how convicted of His way we really are, to see if we hold or break under pressure, to spur us to deeper character. Troubles, failures and hard times happen to all, regardless of wealth, stature or position, but especially to those whom God has called to fill positions in His coming Kingdom. We need to expect them as normal, accept them as signs God is working with us and use them as tools for growth.

Thankfully, we are promised this in the remaining portion of verse 13: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able [to overcome], but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." We are not alone when our lives hit the skids; we have a place to turn for help, strength, solace and solutions.

The story of a Christian's life may not be a Dickens-like *Hard Times*, nor is it *Bleak House*, but we can say confidently that we have *Great Expectations* for the life to come, in the Kingdom of God.

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Prophecy and Love in the Song of Songs](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From this often misunderstood and misinterpreted poetical work, Richard Ritenbaugh extracts some hopeful prophecies along with some vivid descriptions of intimate spiritual love. More parable than allegory, the Song of Songs seems to cast the Shulamite in the role of the church(or an individual Christian) while the beloved seems to equate with Christ the ardent suitor. Highly significant are the two dreams which appear in chapters 3 and 5 respectively. The first resembles the Philadelphian experience while the latter suggests the Laodicean experience. The Shulamite grows in love for her suitor and gets taken to a place of safety.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Garden of God](#)

by Staff

The Bible uses agriculture to provide many lessons for us. Are we learning them—oare we repeating history as Israel did?

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