

Hands That Hang Low

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This past Sabbath, a week ago today, and in the midst of the Days of Unleavened Bread, the following three stories were in the headlines that morning from the Associated Press. The first story:

Like weathermen announcing the daily rainfall, authorities released another tally of corpses unearthed from pits in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas: 32 bodies discovered in the past week, bringing the monthly total to 177. And that's only in one region of the country. The killing fields extend to the nearby states of Durango and Nuevo Leon and to the northwestern states of Sonora and Sinaloa, where so far this month authorities have found 68 bodies. They continue to dig for more.

The graves are discovered with such numbing regularity that "at this point nothing shocks us," wrote Miguel Carbonell in a column for the daily *El Universal* newspaper published Thursday. The drumbeat of dead has prompted scattered marches by outraged citizens and a call by Roman Catholic Cardinal Norberto Rivera to end the "demented" levels of violence in the country. "When will this end, Lord?" Rivera cried during a Holy Thursday Mass, according to the front-page reports of several daily newspapers. "How many innocent people murdered by cowards? How many people kidnapped and extorted, tortured and violated, stripped of their dignity and their freedom, their belongings and their lives?"

Authorities began exhuming corpses in San Fernando on April 1 after they were led to the site by suspects who confessed to kidnapping and killing bus passengers traveling through the area. It is the same region where authorities say the Zetas drug gang killed and buried 72 Central American migrants in August.

Prosecutors said that 122 of the unearthed bodies could be those of passengers, who began disappearing in late March. The other 53 were killed before the kidnappings, they said.

The Zetas are also suspected in the latest massacre. Federal prosecutors have detained more than 60 suspects in the case, including the alleged

leader of the Zetas' San Fernando cell, Martin Estrada.

The motive for the bus abductions remains unclear, though prosecutors have suggested the gang may have been forcefully recruiting people to work for it.

Many of those who have disappeared are poor men from the Mexican countryside traveling to northern Mexico or heading to the United States in search for work. Most were never reported missing by their families out of fear.

The second story:

St. Louis' main airport was closed for business Saturday while crews cleaned up after a tornado tore through a terminal, causing several injuries and sending people scurrying for shelter as plated glass shattered around them. Friday evening's storm at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport ripped away a large section of the main terminal's roof, forcing the airport to close indefinitely and diverting incoming flights to other cities.

At Lambert, installation and roofing tile was strewn about the inside and outside of one terminal. Large, plate-glass windows were blown out. A shuttle was teetering precariously from the top level of a parking garage.

Dianna Merrill, 43, a mail carrier from St. Louis, was at Lambert waiting to fly to New York with a friend for vacation. She said her flight had been delayed by weather and she was looking out a window hoping her plane would pull up. But the window suddenly exploded.

"Glass was blowing everywhere. The ceiling was falling. The glass was hitting us in the face. Hail and rain were coming in. The wind was blowing debris all over the place," she said. "It was like being in a horror movie. Grown men were crying. It was horrible."

Merrill said she felt lucky to be alive and that airport workers quickly moved people to stairwells and bathrooms to get them out of harm's way.

Just one week before, in a period of 3 days from Thursday April 14 thru Saturday April 16, 241 tornadoes ripped across 14 States, killing 39 people and leaving hundreds of millions of dollars in damages.

And, the third story:

Syrian security forces fired on tens of thousands of mourners during funeral processions Saturday, killing at least six people following the deadliest day of the uprising against authoritarian President Bashar Assad.

The funeral processions for some 75 people killed Friday were highly charged gatherings, with people shouting slogans against the regime as they carried coffins through the streets.

Syrian security forces fired bullets and tear gas Friday at tens of thousands of protesters across the country in a clear sign that regime was prepared to escalate an already bloody response to more than five weeks of unrest. Some 300 people have been killed since the uprising began in mid-March.

In Washington, President Barack Obama said the violence was "outrageous" and called on Assad to obey the will of his people by giving them freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and the ability to choose their leaders.

Among those killed Friday were a 70-year-old man and two boys ages 7 and 10, according to Amnesty International. The scenes of carnage were posted on the protest movement's main Facebook page.

In Izraa, a man ran through the streets carrying the body of a young boy, whose hair was matted with blood from a gaping wound on his head, as another child wept and shouted, "My brother!"

Brethren, these were only a few of the stories that were headlined that particular Sabbath morning of rest, among all those that populate the news every day, and these stories may not even be as bad as the ones we read about, like the mother driving her children into the river to drown them, or the predators on the internet that may be living around the corner or right down the street.

We live in a time when the overwhelming evils of II Timothy 3:1-6 are coming to fruition in spades and the resulting death and destruction is bringing the anxiety levels of daily living to a new level.

As a matter of fact let us turn there, but I would like to read it from the Amplified Bible.

II Timothy 3:1-6 (Amplified Bible) But understand this, that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress and trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear]. For people will be lovers of self and [utterly] self-centered, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate [greedy] desire for wealth, proud and arrogant and contemptuous boasters. They will be abusive (blasphemous, scoffing), disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy and profane. [They will be] without natural [human] affection (callous and inhuman), relentless (admitting of no truce or appeasement); [they will be] slanderers (false accusers, troublemakers), intemperate and loose in morals and conduct, uncontrolled and fierce, haters of good. [They will be] treacherous [betrayers], rash, [and] inflated with self-conceit. [They will be] lovers of sensual pleasures and vain amusements more than and rather than lovers of God. For [although] they hold a form of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it [their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession]. Avoid [all] such people [turn away from them]. For among them are those who worm their way into homes and captivate silly and weak-natured and spiritually dwarfed women, loaded down with [the burden of their] sins [and easily] swayed and led away by various evil desires and seductive impulses.

We are coming on times that are so overwhelmingly stressful that even people in God's Church are feeling a crushing weight of so much stress. It is bringing many dangerously close to chronic depression. This is a trap we cannot allow ourselves to fall into.

I have known a few people over the years who have found themselves in this state of chronic depression, and it has troubled me; what can I do to help?

Today I would like to take a short look at what we in God's Church as one body must be doing about it.

Perhaps these days are even more stressful for those in God's Church because we have seen this coming, and we know that the natural and man-made disasters we are seeing are only the beginning of things! This very knowledge may be a trigger Satan is using to try to get us to shoot ourselves in the head! Right as we stand on the edge of the next step in God's plan and purpose, Satan will try to use our God given understanding as a tool to defeat us! It is very important that we never forget where our real threat lies in all this.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (Amplified Bible) In conclusion, be strong in the Lord [be empowered through your union with Him]; draw your strength from Him [that strength which His boundless might provides]. Put on God's whole armor [the armor of a heavy-armed soldier which God supplies], that you may be able successfully to stand up against [all] the strategies and the deceits of the devil. For we are not wrestling with flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the despotisms, against the powers, against [the master spirits who are] the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) sphere. Therefore put on God's complete armor, that you may be able to resist and stand your ground on the evil day [of danger], and, having done all [the crisis demands], to stand [firmly in your place]. Stand therefore [hold your ground], having tightened the belt of truth around your loins and having put on the breastplate of integrity and of moral rectitude and right standing with God, and having shod your feet in preparation [to face the enemy with the firm-footed stability, the promptness, and the readiness produced by the good news] of the Gospel of peace. [Isa 52:7.] Lift up over all the [covering] shield of saving faith, upon which you can quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked [one]. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword that the Spirit wields, which is the Word of God. Pray at all times (on every occasion, in every season) in the Spirit, with all [manner of] prayer and entreaty. To that end keep alert and watch with strong purpose and perseverance, interceding in behalf of all the saints (God's consecrated people).

Brethren please keep verse 18 in mind, because this is the focus of this message today—interceding on behalf of all God's consecrated people!

However, right now I would like to take a quick look at clinical depression based on some of the studies men have done, and I will be quoting mostly from a study reported in *Whole Health Chicago*. The study basically reflects the majority of other reports I have seen on this major modern epidemic. And please keep in mind, often what goes on in the world God allows to happen in the Church. However, with us, if handled His way, God will use it towards our perfection.

They begin by describing and defining depression—what it is, what it looks like, and what they in their studies have determined causes it. Keep in mind that this is not taking

into account what God has to say about it and how to deal with it, but it does give a very useful description of the problem.

What is Depression? Depression is more than just "feeling blue" or experiencing sadness or grief because of a specific circumstance. It is a mood disorder characterized by a persistently sad or empty feeling, irritability, and a diminished or absent interest in everyday activities. Usually depression occurs in episodes, which can last for weeks, months, or even years. Many patients experiencing such bouts of depression actually feel quite "normal" in between flare-ups.

Depressive moods can range from mild but enduring feelings of sadness, to a really profound despair that typically interferes with routine daily functions.

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About 18 million Americans suffer from periods of clinical depression, which can be defined as a sense of sadness noticeable enough to require treatment. Women seem to be affected twice as often as men (but men are suspected to be underreported). Episodes can occur at any age, though often they first surface during adolescence.

They go on now to identify key symptoms, but I think it is interesting to note that the first three have been the driving force in human nature to varying degrees, since the Garden of Eden, encouraged by those evil spirits Paul warned about in Ephesians 6:12.

- Persistent feelings of sadness or "emptiness"
- A sense of hopelessness, worthlessness, and guilt
- The inability to enjoy ordinary pleasurable activities, including sex
- A noticeable change of appetite, possibly accompanied by significant weight loss or weight gain
- Shifts in sleeping patterns, such as insomnia or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, persistent irritability, excessive crying
- Preoccupation with thoughts of death or suicide
- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Persistent aches and pains

Brethren, have you noticed that most of these last six symptoms are quite similar to symptoms you might have if you had any other chronic illness that keeps you from really

putting forth a strong individual effort to continue to study, concentrate, and do all you need to do as the called of God? What is the most important thing we can do together in faith for a brother trapped in the difficulties of a life threatening illness, including depression?

Again continuing on.

What Causes Depression? The cause of depression *hasn't been established*. Initial episodes may be connected to a major life event, such as a divorce, serious illness, death of a loved one, or loss of a job. Recurrent episodes, however, appear unrelated to such specific circumstances.

Experts now think that medical, biochemical, and environmental factors all play a role. There is very likely a genetic component behind some cases of depression, because condition appears to run in families, although no specific genes have been identified. Researchers have also focused on depression-linked imbalances in the brain's production of neurotransmitters—chemicals that pass messages from one nerve cell to another.

Frequently, depression develops in response to a medical illness, particularly heart disease; cancer; an endocrine imbalance, such as underactive thyroid or premenstrual syndrome (PMS); or a neurologic disorder such as stroke. Depression is also associated with long-term use of numerous medications, including beta-blockers for high blood pressure, and corticosteroids for arthritis.

Stress, overconsumption of alcohol, smoking, and nutritional deficiencies may also contribute to depression. Some nutritionally oriented physicians believe that hidden food sensitivities and exposures to toxins in the environment are related to depression as well.

I have a side note to affirm the validity of some of this, as I have a friend who is in God's Church, and as a conscientious objector during the war in Vietnam, he was sentenced by a judge to serve out what would have been a two-year term of enlistment as an orderly in a mental hospital. During the course of his service there he was eye witness to the case of someone who had been schizophrenic from adolescence. The hospital lost him for 2 ? days because it turned out they were doing some kind of remodeling project and the man had gotten walled into an area with no windows or doors. When

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they finally found him, he had not eaten in nearly three days and his mental state was perfectly normal. The doctors determined that he had a particular food allergy that was causing his problem and he had been misdiagnosed all those years.

Continuing on:

Some people become depressed during winter months when there is less sunlight—a condition known as SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder. Depression can also be caused or aggravated by inappropriate or unhealthful ways of coping with anger, guilt, and other emotions.

Treatment and Prevention

If you suspect symptoms of depression in yourself or someone close to you, consulting a physician or trusted professional counselor such as your clergyman is an excellent first step. A doctor can help assess the seriousness of any depressive episodes, and determine whether they are associated with particular drugs, medical problems, or other underlying cause. Many clergy are trained in counseling and can advise you if professional medical help is needed.

With these things about depression in mind there are two very fine sermons that were given on this subject and what we need to do individually to deal with the stress, anxiety and depression of this end time age.

I strongly recommend that you study both and make diligent efforts to apply the individual solutions offered in them based on God's word.

The first is, Tape 530 *Antidote to Fear and Depression*, given by Richard Ritenbaugh on November 17, 2001. The second is, Tape 572 *Overcoming Discouragement and Depression*, given by Martin Collins on August 17, 2002.

But today, in the short time we have left, we are going to deal with this subject from a slightly different angle.

When I was putting this sermon together, I entitled it, *Hands that Hang Down*. But as I was listening to Richard's sermon on the last day of Unleavened Bread, I saw the same theme there that I had already made the focus of this message—Corporate Faith!

In the Church as well as in the world there is physical suffering going on, but in the Church it is vital for us to know in faith that God will use them for our perfecting.

Many illnesses like cancers, tumors, defects, diabetes, depressions and the like may be from something that is out of our control as byproducts of medical, biochemical, environmental or genetic problems! We may be able to find certain keys to controlling these things either completely, or in a limited way, or not at all. But all the while we need to faithfully remain entrenched in the promises of God to His family!

Brethren turn with me to a few of those promises, and remember that these include all our illnesses, including chronic depression.

Exodus 15:26 If you diligently heed the voice of the LOORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LOORD who heals you."

Psalms 103:1-4 Bless the LOORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LOORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

Isaiah 53:1-5 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LOORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

I John 3:22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

God has promised to be our only source of real healing. However, God shows us through the apostle Paul that He does not always heal when we think He should, but often uses our infirmities to work out something much greater according to His purpose.

II Corinthians 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Brethren it is here in Romans 5 that we transition to the heart of this sermon today. Please notice what the apostle Paul tells us in the first two verses of this section.

Being justified by faith we now are at peace with God and have access to stand before the Father together, just as we read a little bit ago in Ephesians 2:18. Through Christ we all have access to the Father in the same spirit together.

Please stay with me as I make the case for our major responsibility as a unified body on behalf of all needing to be delivered from our debilitating diseases, including chronic depression.

I John 3:22-24 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

This then draws us back to what Jesus Christ prayed to His Father the night before He suffered and died for our sins, as recorded in John 17.

John 17:20-24 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 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.

Jesus is now in glory at His Father's right hand and that is where He desires that we be together, united in common purpose.

Hebrews 10:19-25 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God,

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Brethren are we holding fast the profession of our hope without wavering in our faith that God will heal every one of us if we are moving as a unified body? We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together either physically, or in the very throne room of God on one another's behalf. God is using our infirmities to drive us to unity with one another, and to Them!

Let us put together a few more scriptures here which further point us to our duty to one another before God to lift up the hands of others that hang down.

Hebrews 12:11-14 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

Hebrews 13:3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

Here in these verses we can see the vivid picture of a training process that may prove to be so painful that it will cause each of us, at different times, to have hands that hang down in weakness and knees that are ready to buckle. But the ultimate end of the process is our journey together to holiness and an everlasting healing together.

It also gives us a clear indication that we take part in this together in the very presence of the Father and the Son in brotherly love to support each other as we battle our individual life crises together!

The apostle Peter makes it profoundly clear in I Peter 2 that, "We are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," and the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 15:1-7 that we are to bear one another's infirmities and that we are to receive one another as Christ receives us, or as some of the word studies show, we are to draw one another into the closest of fellowship, and rescue each other from affliction and loneliness.

Brethren, just as some are battling cancer, diabetes, and a myriad of other genetically linked diseases, so too a few are battling depression and will not climb out without a united effort in corporate faith, as Richard said last week, before the very throne of God.

Brethren, how unified are we in the body of Christ anyway? Our faithfulness to God is not only going to be judged by how much faith we have individually in God's sure promise of healing for ourselves, but also by how carefully we offer sacrifice in prayer of faith for one another in the areas where our hands hang down, and we cannot get up.

James 5:13-16 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

God has allowed every one of us to go through some kind of personal afflictions that certainly push us to limits of our personal faith, but it is in these afflictions that God is expecting to see a unified body lifting up the feeble hands of every one of us that cannot do it alone.

So the question I have for you at the end of this message is, "Are we coming into God's heavenly throne room together in faith and lifting up the hands that hang down of one another in the areas where they cannot raise them themselves?"

This is a vital key to unity and the mutual assurance to each of us that the many working as one body will do in faith what the one could not do alone!