

Thriving In and Beyond Covid:

LIVING

AND

LEADING

With Resurrection Faith!

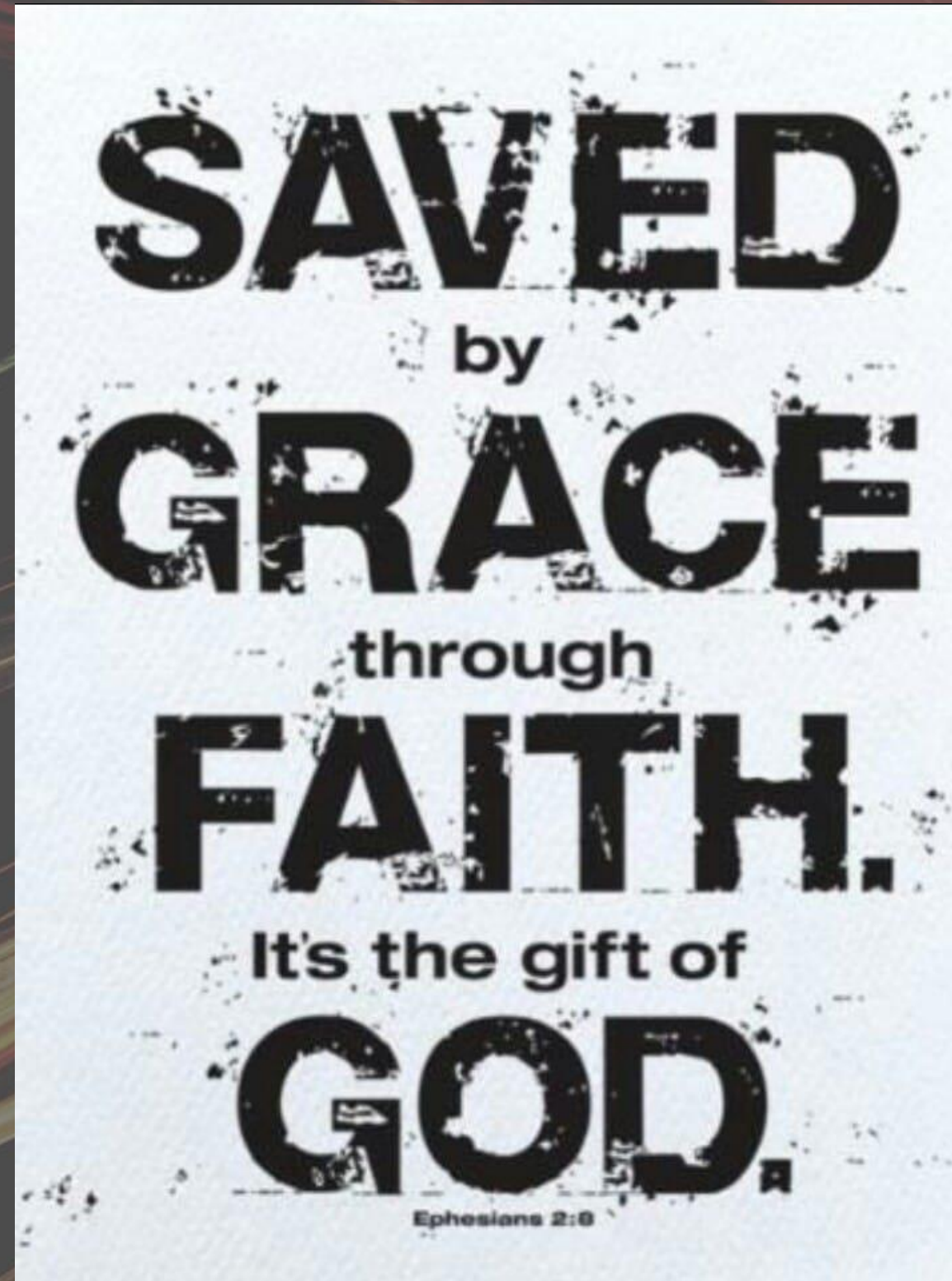
An Obscure Word for Today

James 1:2-8 (NRSV)

² My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; ⁴ and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵ If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. ⁶ But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind, ⁷⁻⁸ for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

The Importance of Moving Beyond Seasons of Doubt to Resurrection Faith



Thriving In and Beyond Covid:

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Be Encouraged!



Inspired and Challenged!



PowerPoint Available
jlinman320@gmail.com
www.ThrivingBeyondCovid.org

PRE-COVID REALITY



*80-90% of U.S.
churches plateaued or
declining.*

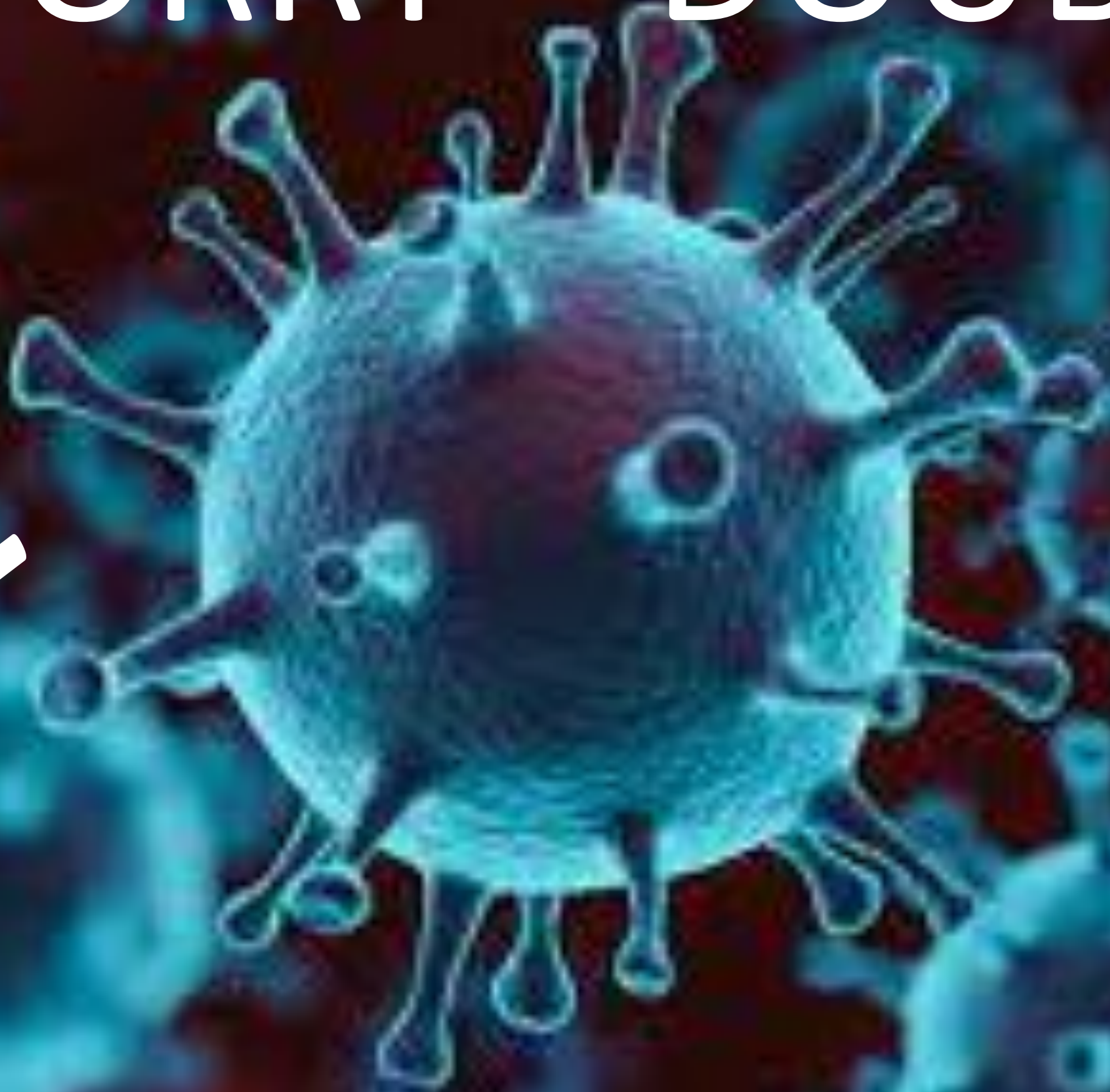
*3,500-4,000
churches were
closing every
year...10+/day.*

FEAR + WORRY = DOUBT



FEAR + WORRY = DOUBT

GONE
VIRAL



CHALLENGING TIMES!

Barna Group Research

- *1 in 5 churches could close as a direct result of COVID*
- *16-22% of active church goers have stopped attending any church*
- *51% of mainline pastors have thought about quitting*

*When fear, worry, and doubt
become the dominant voices,
faith takes a back seat to fear
and the focus shifts to our
diminishing resources.*

The background of the image is a dark, textured surface with a blue and purple color palette. A large, detailed virus particle is the central focus, showing its spherical shape and numerous surface proteins. The text is overlaid on this background.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1929

A close-up photograph of parched, cracked earth. A small, vibrant green plant with several leaves is growing out of one of the cracks. A small, dark, dried stick or piece of wood lies on the cracked surface to the right of the plant.

**SCARCITY
Mindset**

VS

A wide-angle photograph of a lush, green field, likely a rice paddy, under a clear blue sky. A single palm tree stands prominently in the middle ground. In the background, there are utility poles and a line of trees.

**ABUNDANCE
Mindset**

A microscopic view of coronavirus particles, showing their characteristic spherical shape and surface spikes. The image is rendered in a cyan and purple color palette, with a dark background. The text is overlaid on the image.

THE GREAT DISRUPTION

2020

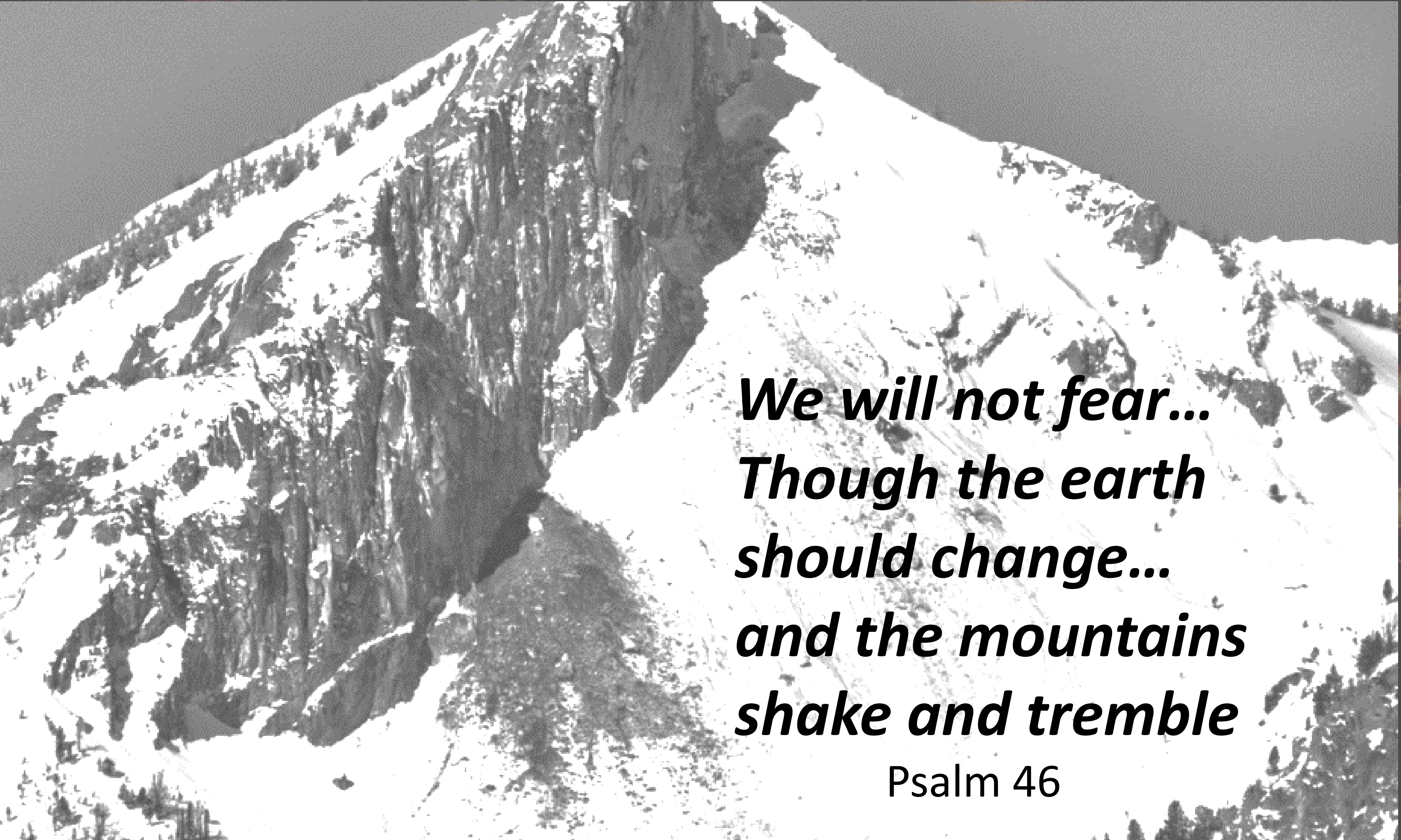
The *LONG-TERM IMPACT* of *COVID* On Congregations Remains *UNCERTAIN*



The background features a complex network of glowing blue lines connecting numerous nodes. Several of these nodes are stylized as virus particles, with a central sphere and radiating spikes. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and digital, set against a dark blue gradient background.

SEISMIC SHIFTS:

Where Do We Go From Here?

A black and white photograph of a rugged, snow-covered mountain peak. The mountain has a prominent, deep crevasse or gully running down its center. The snow is unevenly distributed, with some areas appearing more densely packed than others. The sky is a uniform, dark grey, suggesting an overcast day. The overall scene is one of a high-altitude, mountainous landscape.

***We will not fear...
Though the earth
should change...
and the mountains
shake and tremble***

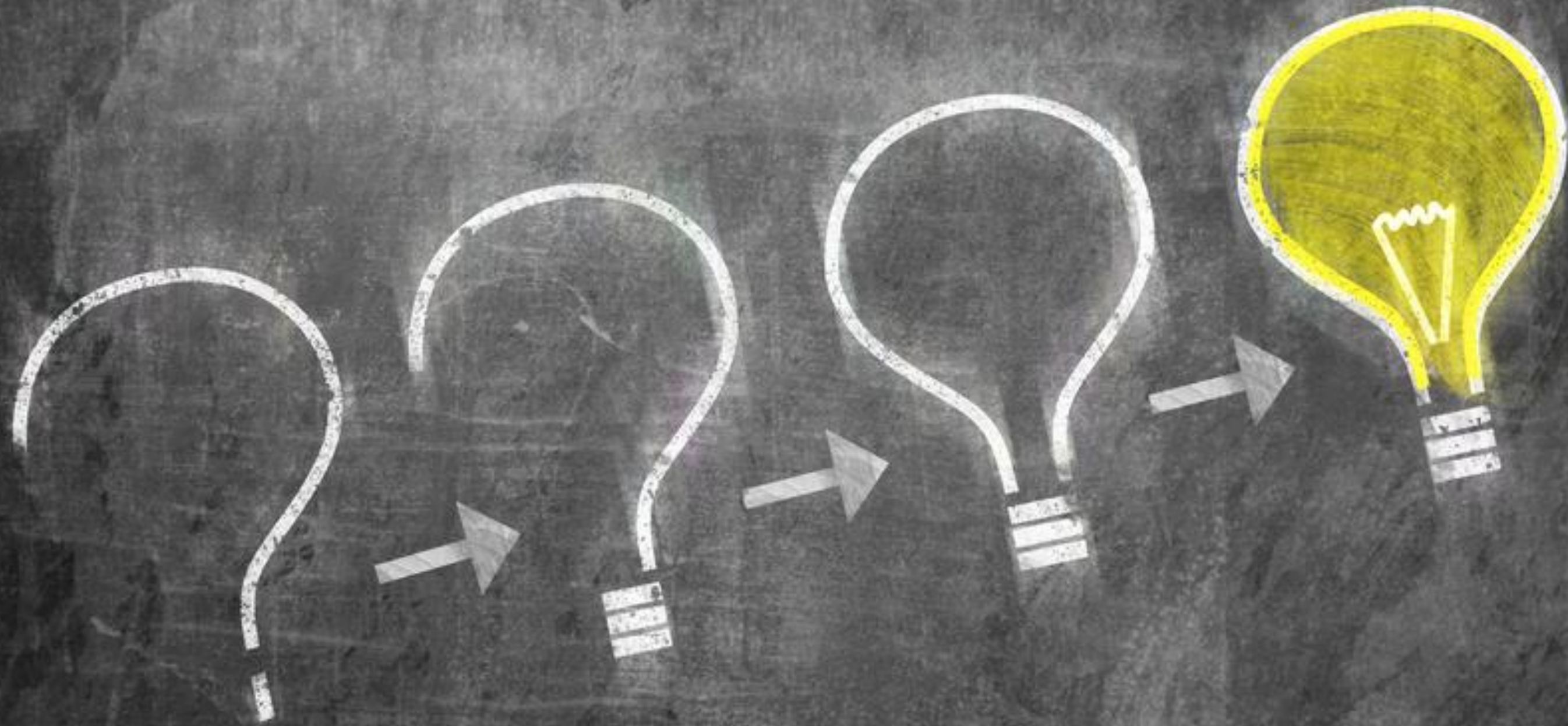
Psalm 46



**IN THE MIDST OF
EVERY CRISIS, LIES
GREAT OPPORTUNITY**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

POST-COVID CHURCH?



God makes all things work together for good.

Romans 8:28



Fear, worry, and doubt can become a cancer in the church deflating the corporate spirit, derailing dreams, and diminishing impact.

JESUS x 24 in the Gospels

FEAR

WORRY

DOUBT

WHERE ARE YOU TODAY?

Fear

Faith



Despair

Hope



Scarcity

Abundance

2023 Mission Challenge

*Move from fear to faith
and from despair to hope...
by focusing not on our limitations
but on God's abundance...
and on the things
God wants to bless!*

*“Trust God more than you’ve
ever trusted God before!”*

July 1996 / March 2023

Is This an Impossible Situation?



Never let an impossible situation intimidate you. Let it motivate you - to pray more, trust more, expect more.

— *Rick Warren* —

AZ QUOTES



Pray More
Trust More
Expect More

Shaped By A Unique Ministry Context



Embrace Ephesians 3:20

*By the power at work within us,
God is able to accomplish
abundantly far more than all we
can ask or imagine!*

Pray More... Trust More... Expect More



Pray More... Trust More... Expect More



*Abundantly far more than all we
could have asked or imagined!*



*Abundantly far more than all we
could have asked or imagined!*



Orlando, Florida



Burundi, Africa



**THE
RIGHT
FRAME
OF MIND.**

Potential



Resource

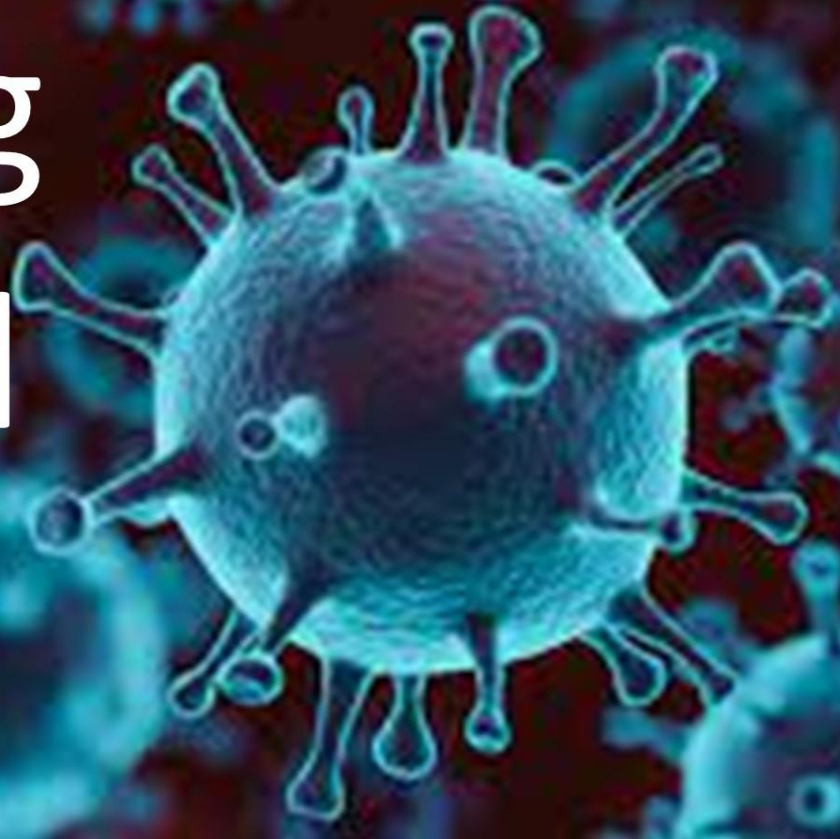
Thriving Beyond COVID



www.ThrivingBeyondCovid.org

Greatest Risk...

Thriving
Beyond
COVID



*Neglecting the
lingering
emotional impact
of COVID...on the
spirit of leaders
and congregations.*

Thriving Beyond COVID: Let Go, Trust God, Rise Up!

*Utilizing the Biblical Witness, Small Group Exercises,
and Directed Conversation to Release Burdens,
Promote Faith, and Empower Greater Kingdom Impact*

FREE EDITABLE DOWNLOADS

Leader Guide

Small Group Participant Guide

Retreat/Large Group Participant Guide

5 Videos and PowerPoint Slides

7 Resource Appendices

Small and Large Group Resource

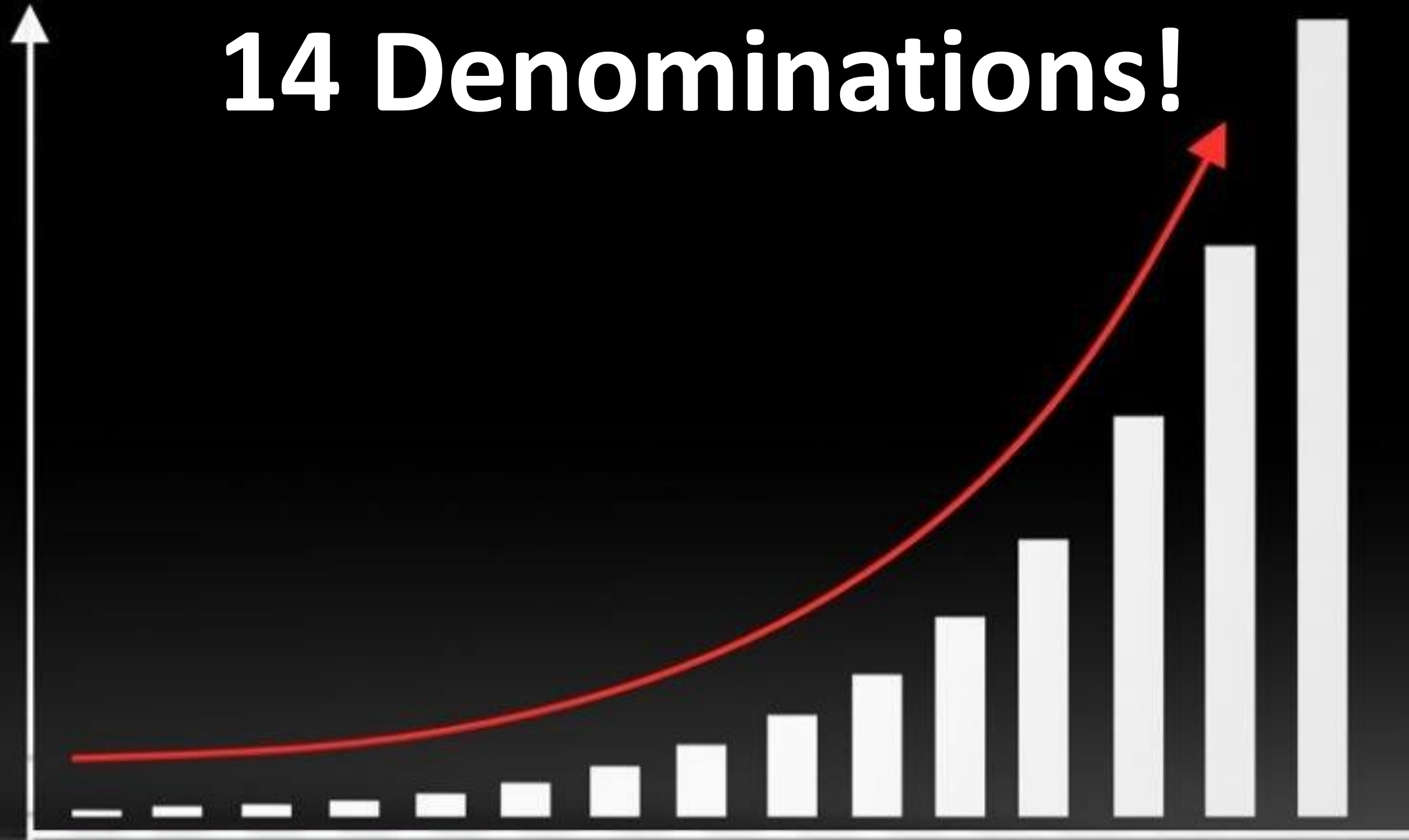
3-4 Sessions or Workshop Format



- *Printable Curriculum*
- *Videos / Updates Coming*
- *Bible Journaling*
- *Small and Large Group Conversation*

www.ThrivingBeyondCovid.org

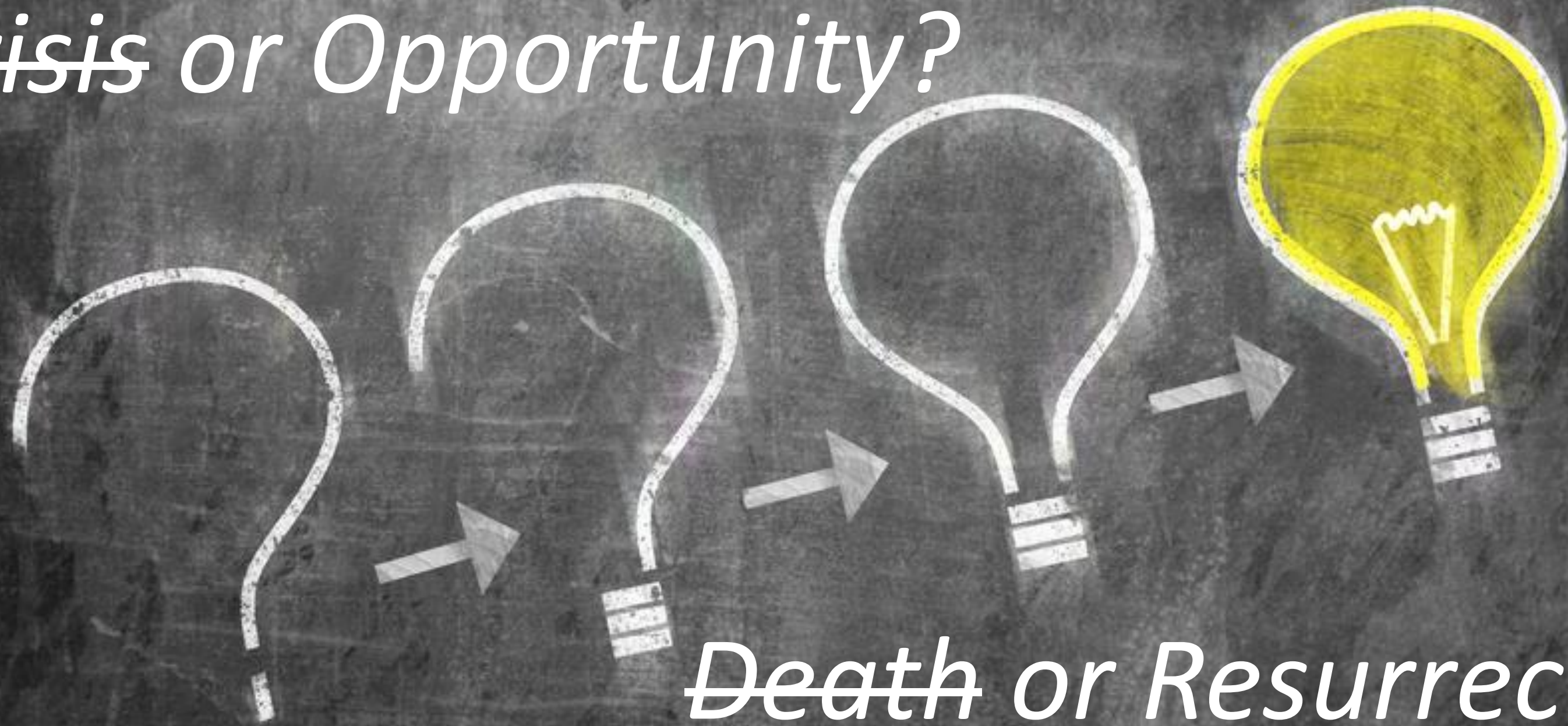
**750 Leaders, 43 States, 7 Countries,
14 Denominations!**



Use It + Share It = Exponential Impact!

Right Frame of Mind

Crisis or Opportunity?



Death or Resurrection?

TO THRIVE!

Embrace This Opportunity



While the Concrete is Still Wet!

Congregational Use

- *Small Group Bible Studies*
- *Church Council Study / Workshop*
- *All-Congregation Weekend Event*
(Interim / New Pastor / Visioning Retreat)
Self-Led or Facilitated

Synodical Use

(To Maximize Impact)

- Zoom Training for Deans
- Congregational Cluster Events
- Rostered Leader Gathering Workshop
(Conference Level and Synod Level)
- Synod-Wide Zoom Webinar
- Synod Assembly Workshop



My Top Concern

*Discouraged
and Weary
Leaders with
Depleted Faith*

Thriving In and Beyond Covid:

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Thriving In and Beyond _____ :

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A Sobering Challenge

The doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

James 1: 7-8

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

James 1:2-8

Jesus

Do not doubt but believe

John 20:31

Through believing you may have life

Luther

Justified by grace through faith

LEADERS NEED TO LEAD!

Leaders can't lead people where they don't believe it's possible to go.

Congregations will not thrive until their leaders believe it's possible.

THE ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP

*Share your Fears, Worries, and Doubts
with God and others so they do
not eat away at your congregation's
recovery and future vitality*

IT STARTS WITH YOU!

This is the goal for Session 1

Not Unlike

STEP 2 OF THE 12 STEPS

*Came to believe that a power
greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity.*

Bill Wilson: Co-Founder of AA

Recovery depends on successfully completing this step!

Could Ephesians 3:20 Be Our Step 2 Confession of Faith?

*By the power at work within us,
God is able to accomplish
abundantly far more than all we
can ask or imagine!*

Bill Wilson's Leap of Faith

*Act as if you believe in a higher
power for a month
and see what happens!*



The first step is
always the
hardest!
Just ask Peter...
or my 1st
grandchild, Emory!

Attitude Influences Outcome!



We Must Create a New and Right Spirit!

Thriving Beyond COVID



www.ThrivingBeyondCovid.org

**THE
RIGHT
FRAME
OF MIND.**

Scripture

Research

Attitude Differences Separate Growing and Declining Churches

#1 Difference: We Can vs. We Can't

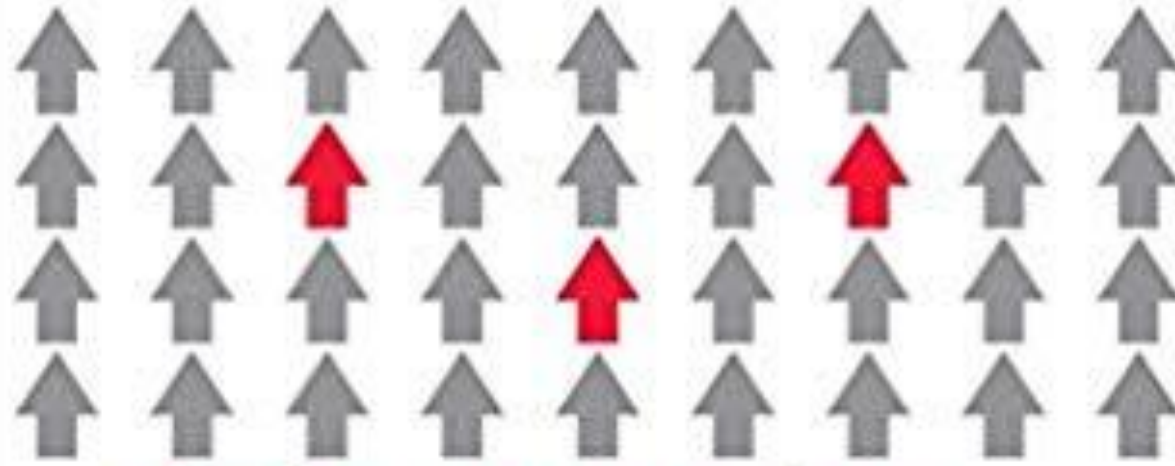
The biggest difference I see between growing churches and declining churches is the attitude around what's possible.

Growing churches believe they can.

Declining churches believe they can't.

They're both right. - - - Growing churches make a way when there's no way, which seems to be what God specializes in if you read the Bible.



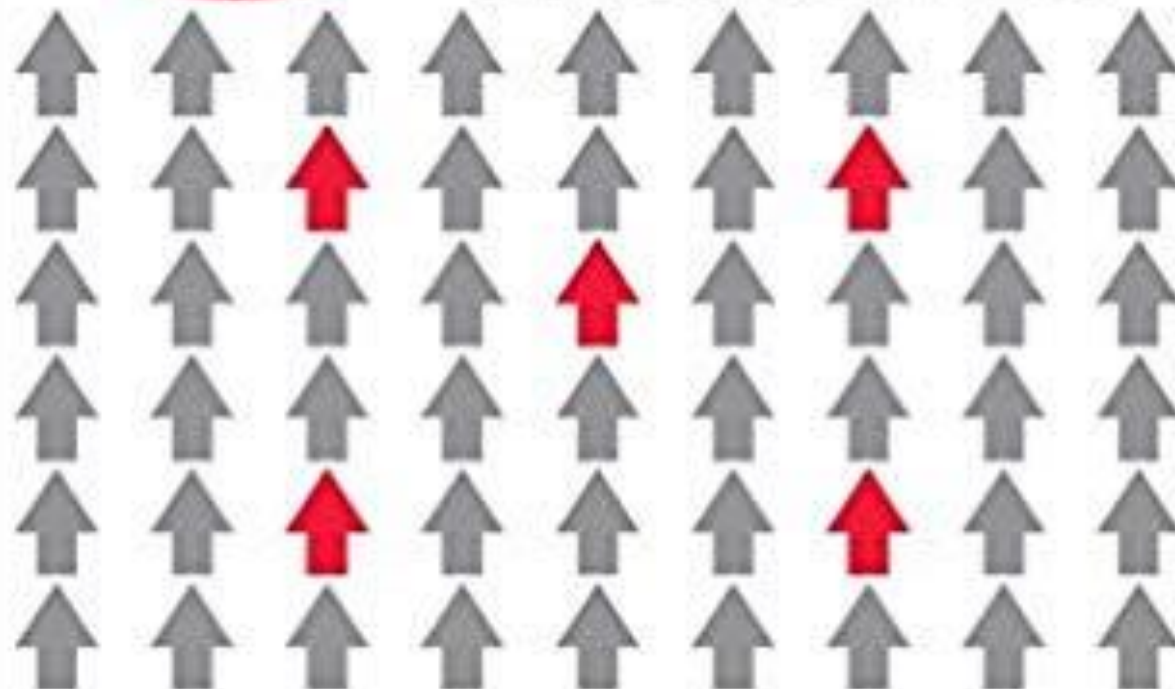


Matt Miofsky
& Jason Byassee

Foreword by Jacob Armstrong

8

VIRTUES OF RAPIDLY GROWING CHURCHES





**Greatest Game
Changing Decision
Leaders Can Make:**

***Believe that the Spirit
is up to something
significant in their
congregation!***

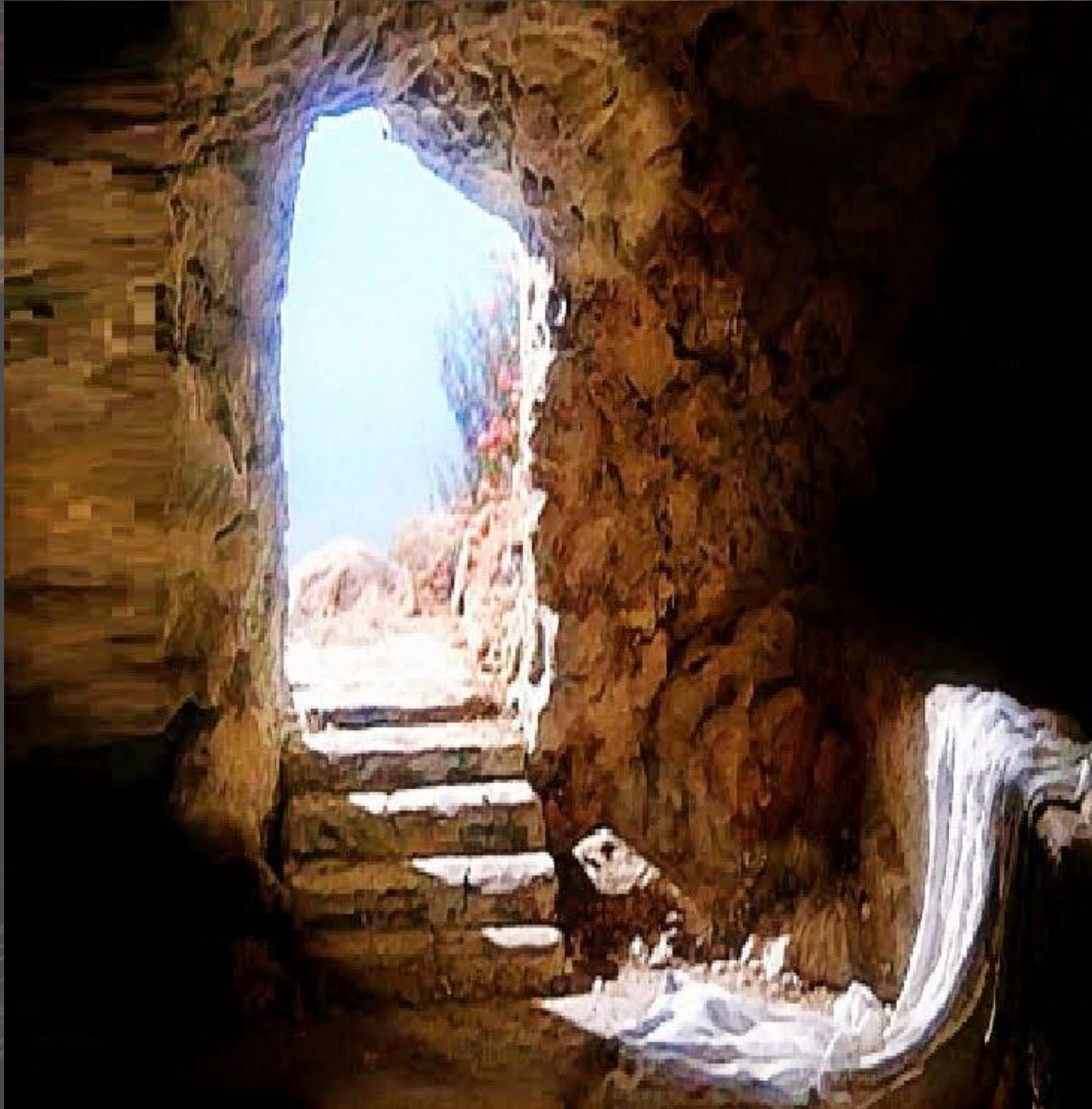
Eight Virtues of Rapidly Growing Churches: Byassee and Miofsky

“In small towns and big cities, in wealthy churches and poor ones. In multisite megachurches and in rural four-point churches. Miracles are happening. Here is the difference: some churches and leaders live, work and act like they believe this, and others don’t. This distinction makes all the difference.”

Talk to any of the pastors we interviewed, and you will instantly see that before there was any evidence that a church would work, these pastors believed that God was up to something, that God was going to do something significant. They were determined to be a part of it. Acting as if the Spirit is moving changes everything.”

Another Impossible Situation?





**The Power
of
Expectancy
is
Real!**

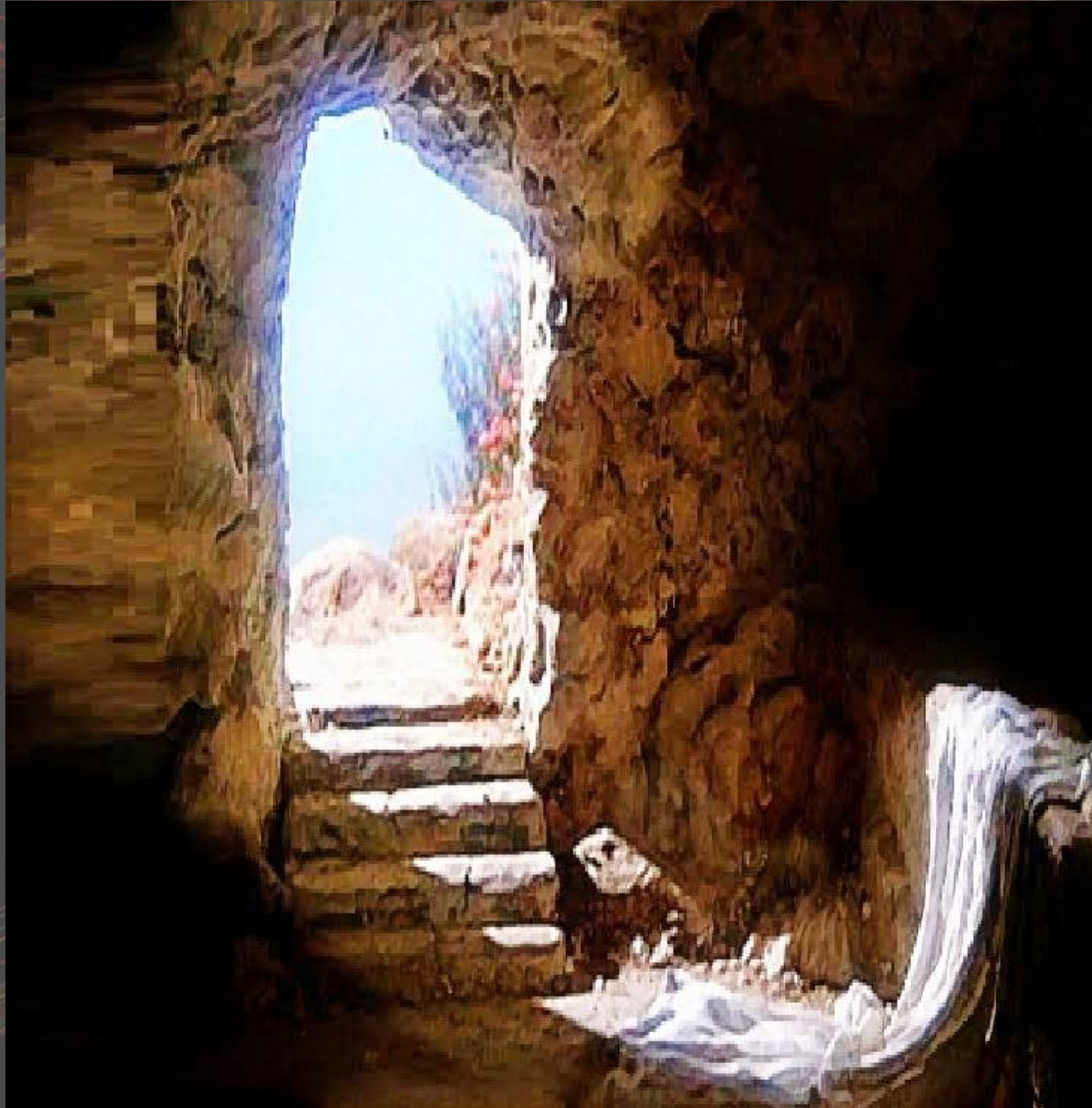
Paul's Resurrection Witness

*By the power at work within us,
God is able to accomplish
abundantly far more than
all we can ask or imagine!*

Ephesians 3:20



**IT'S
FRIDAY
BUT
SUNDAY'S
COMING**



**Expect
God
To
Surprise
You!**

Thriving Beyond COVID

- *Release The Burdens*
- *Promote Deeper Faith*
- *Empower Mission*



LET GO

Of What's Holding You Back



Fears, Worries, and Doubts



*An opportunity for
people to share their
congregational
fears, worries, and
doubts with God
and others.*

This session is powerful and liberating and can stand alone

TRUST GOD

*To Empower Your Dreams and
Embrace Your Opportunities!*



Ephesians 3:20



*An opportunity for
people to name the
new ministry
possibilities COVID
has revealed and
then dream about
seizing the moment.*

RISE UP


To Face The Obstacles!



Take your
next step.



An opportunity for people to name the lessons learned from Covid about their congregation, its mission, and the obstacles ahead.

Autopsy
of a 
Deceased
Church

12 WAYS TO KEEP YOURS ALIVE

Thom S. Rainer

Read by Maurice England

10 Paths of Decline

Slow Erosion

Past is Our Hero

Refusing to Look Like Our Community

Budget Moves Inwardly

The Great Commission Becomes The Great Omission

Being a Preference-Driven Church

Pastoral Tenures Decreasing

Rarely Praying Together

No Clear Purpose

Obsessing Over Facilities

Congregational Self-Assessment

10 Paths of Decline

Slow Erosion (we are on a slow path of decline)

_____ Not on This Path at All

_____ Slightly on This Path

_____ Well Down The Road

_____ Crossing the "*It is Finished*" Line



Q & A

Thriving In & Beyond Covid:

Living and Leading
With Resurrection Faith

PowerPoint Available
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Break Out Room Conversation Starters

1. What was your reaction to the concluding verses in the James 1 passage: *For the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord?*
2. How pervasive are fear, worry, and doubt among rostered leaders in the ELCA and what impact is that having on their leadership effectiveness and congregational vitality?
3. Brainstorm some ideas for renewing the spirit and faith of rostered leaders...and subsequently...congregational members.