

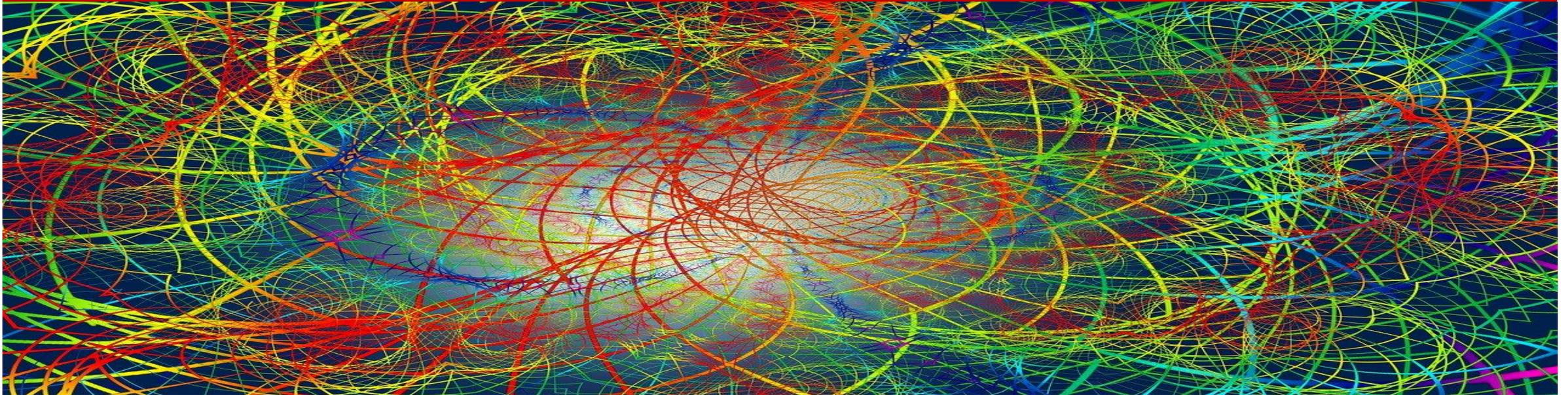
# Praying Through A Pandemic

Presented by

*Rev. Dr. Jessica Kendall Ingram*

First District Virtual Planning Meeting

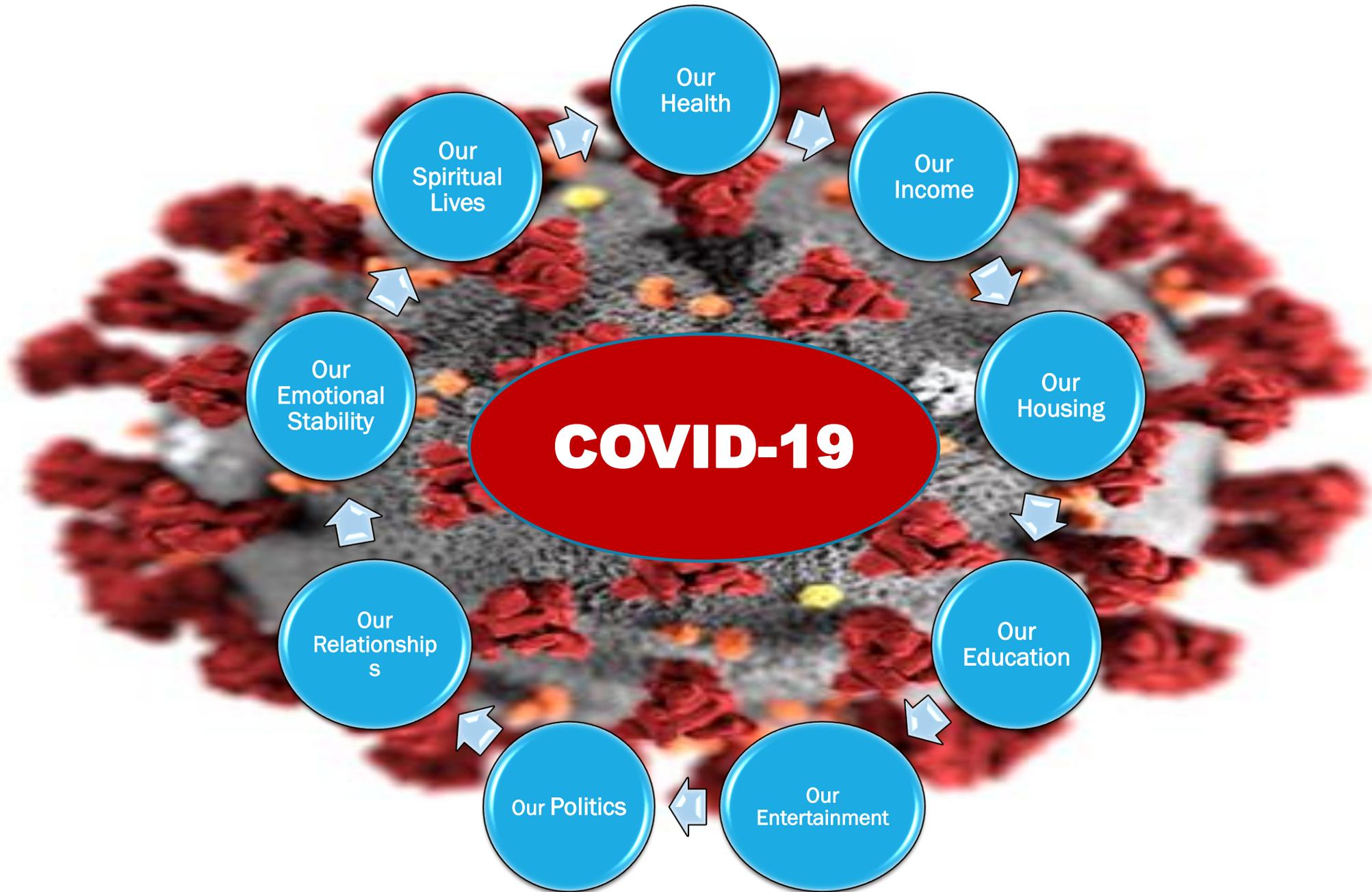
August 27, 2020



# WEBSTER'S DEFINITION OF PANDEMIC:

*"An outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population."*

According to this definition we, without a doubt, are experiencing a pandemic. We all know this present pandemic is affecting virtually every aspect of our lives.



While we have certainly encountered major challenges in our lives in the past, we have never, ever experienced anything like the effects of COVID-19. And whatever we experienced in the past, we always had the community of faith, our houses of worship as a place of solace and comfort. This is not our present reality. Not having the “*temple presence*” has had and is having a profound effect on our spiritual wellbeing; especially in prayer.



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**Recently, I have been reading Walter Bruggemann's book entitled, "*Virus as A Summons to Faith, Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief and Anxiety*". The book has been instrumental in my reflecting theologically on this present pandemic. Chapter four was especially insightful. It gave me a fresh understanding of what it means to keep praying while going through this pandemic.**

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**In this 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, “*Praying Amid the Virus*”, Bruggeman discusses prayer and pestilence in the Old Testament. He says, “One of the great prayers of the Old Testament is the prayer placed in the mouth of Solomon at the dedication of the Jerusalem temple. (Kings 8:23-53). The prayer of the king voices primary accents of the faith of Israel and is in part didactic according to the Deuteronomistic tradition that shapes the narrative. In the center of the prayer is a long series of instances of disaster that will invite and evoke Israel’s prayers to YHWH. (VV. 31-53).**

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**This section of the prayer is introduced by a general petition asking that God should hear, heed and forgive. (v.10). Then follow a series of seven cases of urgent need.**

- **Sin against a neighbor (v.31)**
- **Defeat in war (v.33)**
- **Drought (v.35)**
- **Plague (pestilence), blight, mildew (v.37)**
- **Prayer of a foreigner (v.44)**
- **A time of war (v.44)**
- **In captivity (v. 46, pg. 36)**

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***“THE SEQUENCE OF THE PETITIONS ASSUMES THAT GOD CAN BE MOBILIZED TO ACT IN RESPONSE TO A LIVED EMERGENCY. GOD SURELY HAS THE POWER AND THE CAPACITY TO OVERCOME THE STATED DISASTER WHEN GOD IS MOBILIZED.” (PG. 37)***

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**This prayer is being prayed for the dedication of the temple. *“This remarkable prayer, insists and asserts that the temple now being dedicated is primarily an arena for prayers to YHWH (Yahweh).***

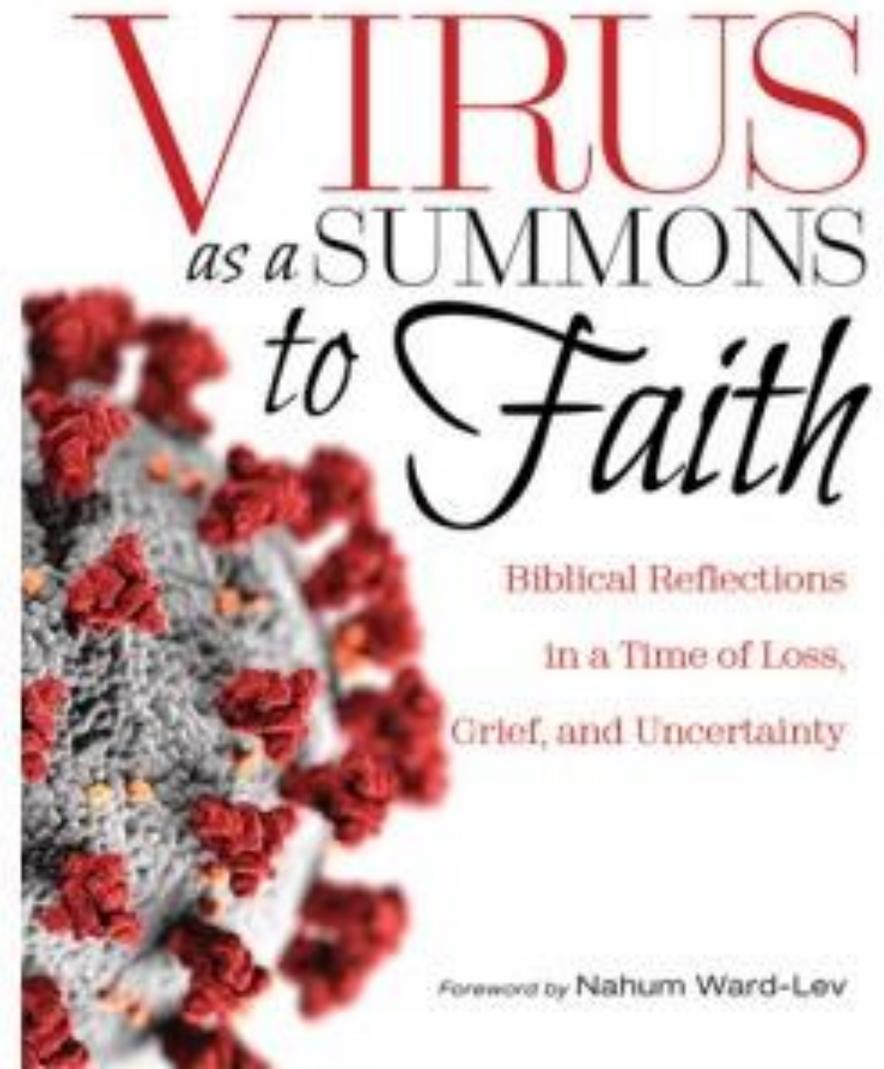
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*The main purpose of the temple is praying and being heard. It is affirmed that prayer is the effective antidote for every form of disaster. We may notice, however, that this statement, of effective antidote is in the form of trust and not a flat certitude. It is a genuine petition that trusts, but does not know that YHWH will answer. That it is an interaction between two free agents and not a mechanical or automatic transaction.”*



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- I am asserting that the words of Brueggemann about the context of the prayer given by Solomon has implications for us today as we are praying through this pandemic.
  - In the Bible, when the people of God prayed while they were making their way through disasters in their lives, there was always an emotional response (because God usually did not respond when and how they wanted God to respond) even in the midst of their praying.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN



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**David's soul was cast down. (Psalm 42:5)**

**Jeremiah grew weary of the ongoing problems he faced as a prophet.  
(Jeremiah 15:15-18)**

**Jehoshaphat declared that he was confused and did not know what to do.  
(II Chronicles 20:12)**

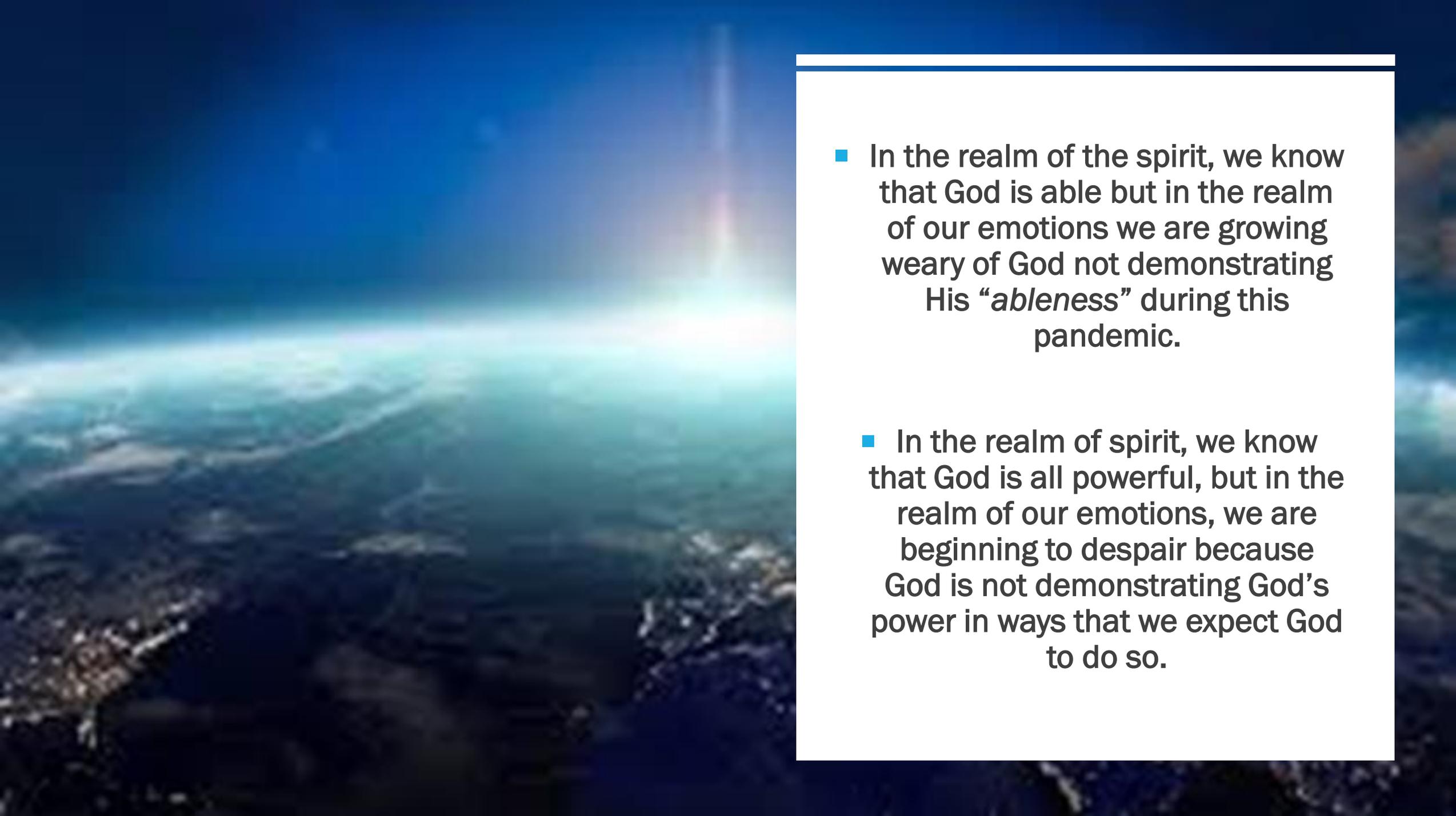
**Hannah's soul was weary. (I Samuel 1:9)**

**Job was reduced to tears. (Job 17: 16)**

**LIKEWISE, WE TOO HAVE AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE WHILE WE ARE PRAYING FOR  
GOD TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PANDEMIC.**

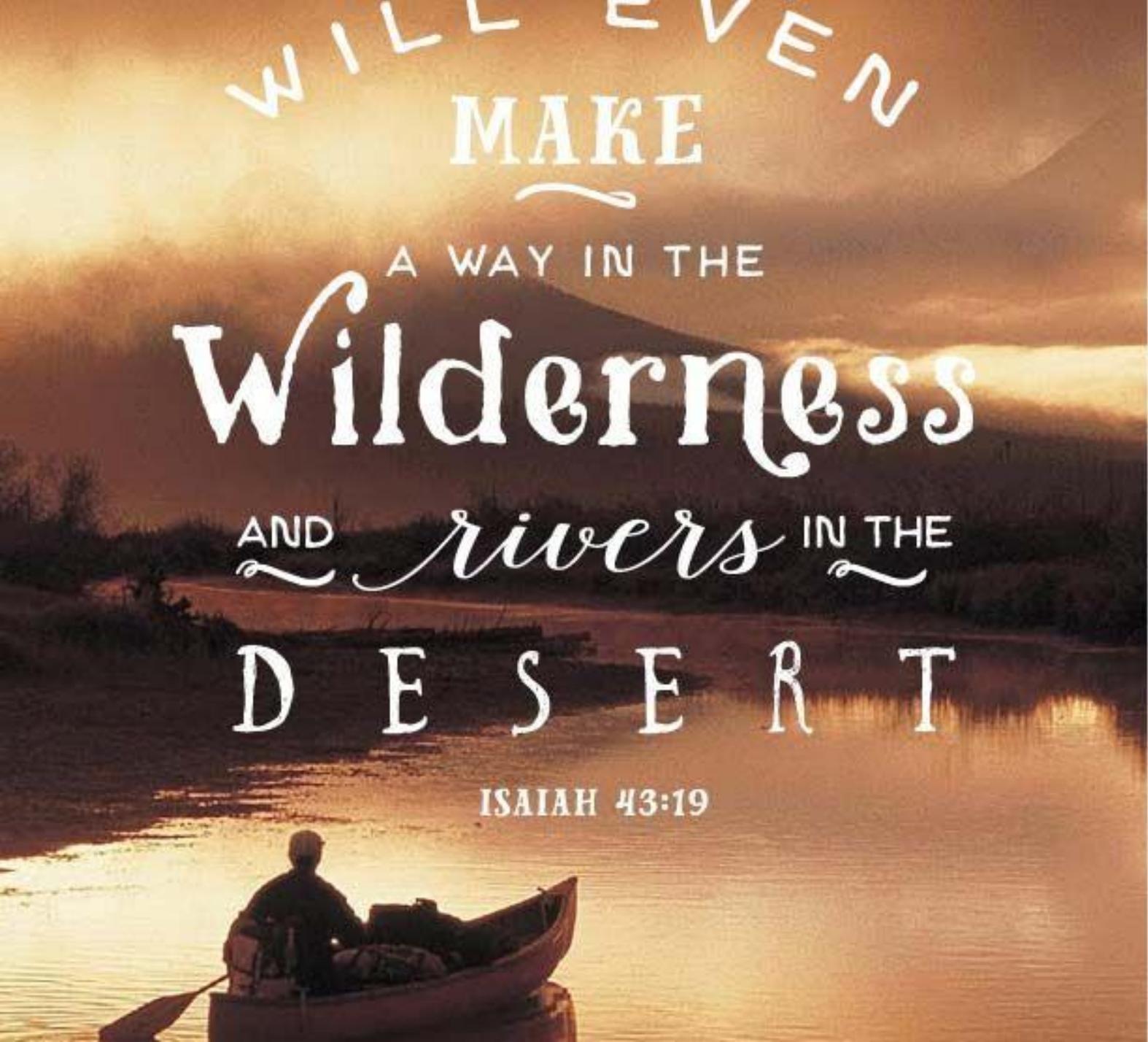
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**THIS HAS (IF WE ARE HONEST)  
BECOME A TIME OF BATTLE  
BETWEEN WHAT WE KNOW IN  
THE REALM OF THE SPIRIT AND  
WHAT WE ARE EXPERIENCING IN  
THE REALM OF OUR EMOTIONS.**

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- The background of the slide is a photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, rocky hills or mountains. In the middle ground, there are rolling green hills. In the background, there is a bright, hazy sky with a rainbow visible on the left side. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greens, and browns.
- In the realm of the spirit, we know that God is able but in the realm of our emotions we are growing weary of God not demonstrating His “*ableness*” during this pandemic.
  - In the realm of spirit, we know that God is all powerful, but in the realm of our emotions, we are beginning to despair because God is not demonstrating God’s power in ways that we expect God to do so.

- In the realm of the spirit we know that God is in control, but in the realm of our emotions we become dismayed because we cannot control this pandemic.
- In the realm of the spirit we know God answers prayers, but in the realm of our emotions we are starting to become drained from praying repeatedly and some of our prayers are yet unanswered.





WILL EVER  
MAKE  
A WAY IN THE  
**Wilderness**  
AND *rivers* IN THE  
D E S E R T

ISAIAH 43:19

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- If we are honest (and I am) we would admit that living during this pandemic for the past five months has affected our prayer lives. Not only are we confronted with learning how to navigate new territory as it relates to ministry, we now must learn how to navigate new spiritual territory. We cannot canoe our prayer life in the same manner we did in the past.
  - Because I try not to teach what I have not experienced, please allow me to share with you what I have learned about praying through this pandemic.

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## **OUR PRAYERS CAN AND SHOULD BECOME A PLACE OF LAMENT.**

Dr. Nichelle Guidry said at the beginning of this COVID-19 season that this is a *“lamentable moment.”* In the book, *“No More Faking Fine,”* by Esther Fleece, she says, *“lament is simply expressing honest emotions to God when life is not going as planned. It is prayer that says, “God I’m hurting. Will you meet me here?”* She goes on to say, *“Lament is a pathway. Honest expression to God makes way for God to come and work God’s real healing.”* (pg. 39) Lament is a channel for powerful transformation. It’s Biblical to lament in our prayers. Most of the Psalms are laments and certainly the book of Lamentations. Lamenting in your prayer time does not mean you do not have faith. It does mean your relationship with God is one where you can be honest.

- **God will meet us where we are in prayer and not where we tend to be.**
  - **We do not have to fake it when we pray.**
    - **God can handle all our emotions.**
      - **God made us emotional beings.**

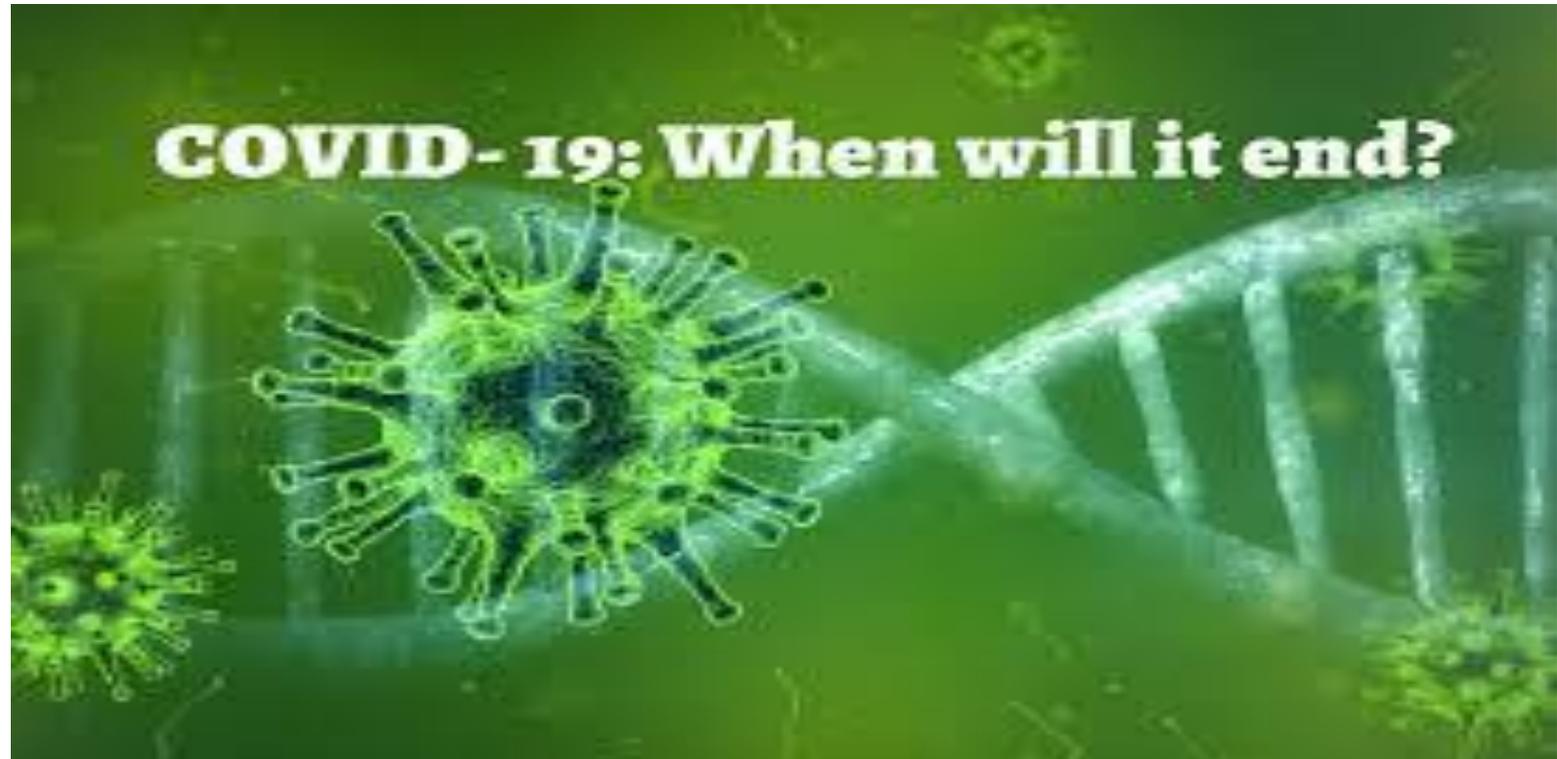
- Prayer should be a place of authenticity and transparency with God.
- The truth is sometimes we just can't pray. I read somewhere years ago that, *"to desire to pray is to pray."*

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**The longevity of this pandemic just might change your normal way of praying. Don't be upset or discouraged about it. Be patient with yourself until you get to the *"New Next"* in your prayer life.**

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**While we may be praying for this pandemic to end, (and that certainly is a legitimate prayer), we may want to consider Walter Brueggemann's theological position.**



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- He asserts that *“when the prayers of Israel were spoken during their time of crisis, their pandemic, Israel focused on their covenantal relationship with God.”* He also states that, *“The text neither lingers to describe the disaster nor do they spend much energy on “YHWH’s affirmative answer. Rather, the accent is on faithfulness in uttering the prayer and readiness to trust that it will be heard. That is, the accent is on the effectiveness and reliability of the relationship that recontextualizes the disaster. The decisive concern is not transactionalist but faithfulness.”*

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***On the one hand, stress is placed on YHWH's reliable fidelity with reference to either the covenantal promises to Moses (1 Kgs. 8:53) or the unilateral promise to David. (1 Chr. 6:42). On the other hand, while Israel is invited to trustful petition, the accent is in turning, repenting, and being humble before YHWH, that is on re-engaging in a loyal way of covenantal existence in response to the purposes of YHWH's. When it is recognized that Israel's part is a restored covenantal life and YHWH's part is performance of an old promise, the outcome of such prayer is a reinvigoration of the covenantal relationship." (pg. 42)***



# **NATURAL DISASTERS**

Israel realizes that disasters will continue to come, and they continue to trust and hope that YHWH will decisively deal with disaster, but the accent is elsewhere. It is on the truthfulness and reliability of the relationship. As a result, the disaster is rendered penultimate and therefore, not life denying. Israel may indeed hope and trust that the threat of pestilence will be overcome. But its energy is devoted to a covenantal life with YHWH..

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**The reality is that one day this pandemic may end, but the problems of life will not. We will have our individual pandemics. Our challenge then becomes that of allowing our prayer life to be the place of changing, growing and maturing in our relationship with GOD.**

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