

# “*Now What?*”

March, 2020 – Lanny Cook

We are living through a time that is unlike anything any of us have ever encountered. The fear, panic and uncertainty associated with this unparalleled world event has placed nearly everyone in a state of paranoia and baffling confusion. People are stock-piling and hoarding everything on the store shelves in fear of an apocalypse. Of course, it's easy to understand why so many people are in a state of near-panic through the media's depiction of this officially declared pandemic of biblical proportions. Normal living has been cast aside as social distancing has become the official law of the land. We've been sequestered to social isolation. Businesses have been shut down. Medical care has been relegated to emergency care only. Routine procedures, office visits, preventive care visits and elective surgeries have been terminated for most cases. Toilet paper, cleaning supplies and basic necessities are hard to find in nearly every store. It seems that people have lost the ability for using any form of common sense or practical thinking. Nearly every day we are greeted with another headline causing panic in the hearts of humanity.

As the reality of this current situation knocks us to our knees, it's easy to throw up our hands in defeat to declare “*Now What?*” What am I going to do? How am I going to get through this? What happens if I get sick or die from this dreaded virus? Now what do I do with all these bills? What do I do with all this mess? How do I respond? How will I survive? The circumstances of the past few months has perpetuated a “*Now What?*” response throughout all aspects of society.

It seems like just when you think it can't get any worse, it does. Actually, for much of society we have gone from “*Now What?*” to “*You've Got to be Kidding Me?*” It's hard to cope with the reality that everything has been turned upside down and our neat little world has lost all semblance of sanity. Where can we turn to find hope? How do we get back to a sense of normalcy? In a world that seems to offer more panic than answers, I've realized there is only

one place to turn. That is the Bible. Within my search for answers I've been reminded of the story of Job. Maybe Job wasn't facing a world-wide pandemic, but he was in a season of his life that everything was working against him. He lost his family, all of his possessions, his livelihood, he was sicker than a stray dog with the mange and through his suffering his wife tried to convince him to curse God and die. Tragedy after Tragedy, loss after loss, Job persevered. But I'm pretty sure that every time another tragedy struck, or something else fell apart, he would whisper those same words, "*Now What? You've got to be kidding me?*" Where can I find relief? What else could go wrong? Why is God punishing me? What did I do to deserve this? Why doesn't God love me? Or, why does God allow these terrible things to happen? Those types of cries come out of our lips when we experience desperate times. While they are signs of desperation, actually, they are also an exasperated prayer to God. Dear God, "*Now What?*" Job never blamed God for his problems. It took him 39 chapters for his deliverance to happen and in dog years that was a really long time. I'm sure it seemed like forever to Job too. But Job's life was eventually restored completely. It took time and it took a vast amount of perseverance and faith before Job saw the light at the end of his tunnel of suffering. In many ways, we are all experiencing a time such as in the days of Job. Faith delivered Job and faith will deliver us!

Looking back over the past several months, I think it's safe to say that it has been unlike any of our previous "*Now What?*" moments – ever! This hasn't been like the times where things just seemed to go wrong. This isn't like the times where things just seemed to break down -- the car, the washing machine, the toilet overflowed or the kitchen faucet leaked. You can't compare it to the times where we've experienced one problem after another and they compounded until you were at wits end and ready to throw in the towel. We have nothing to compare the current situation to and we have nothing in our past experience that comes close to the challenges we are currently dealing with. So, what other examples do we have from the Bible where people must have responded with "*Now What?*"

I believe one of the most compelling stories of “*Now What?*” comes from the story of Mary as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. This was the time when the angel appeared to bring her the news of what was about to happen in her life and to the world.

<sup>30</sup> *Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

<sup>31</sup> *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”*

Luke 1:30-33 NKJV

I can almost guarantee that Mary at this particular moment had one of those “You’ve got to be kidding me?” responses. This really didn’t sound like good news and I’d bet my bottom dollar on the fact that she didn’t feel like she had found favor with God. This threw a big wrench in the works of where she thought her life was going. She was engaged to be married and she had never been with a man in the biblical sense. She had to have been in a near state of shock, as she realized that Joseph would know that this child was not his. In that day, a common punishment for this type of sin could be death by stoning. At the very least, Joseph would send her off to fend for herself and live out her life in shame. But then, after the reality began to set in, I’m sure she quickly responded with “*Now What?*” “What will I do?” “Where will I go?” “How will I tell Joseph?” “What will he do to me?” I’m sure her mind was whirling with fear and dread. But, you know what Mary did? She responded in two profound ways.

First she chose to ...

### **...take God at His Word**

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”*

Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV

Second, she chose to....

### **... ponder God’s Word**

*But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

Luke 2:19 NKJV

*Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.* Psalm 119:11 NKJV

There is a significance in the term “Word” that needs to be realized within the context of this lesson. Again, it’s found within the true definition regarding the use of the term “Word” within the Bible.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1 NIV

Mary took God at His Word. She accepted the Word of God, Jesus --into her life to be her guiding light and Redeemer. Mary wasn’t the only one in this story that experienced some of those “*Now What?*” moments. Joseph had several of his own mind-boggling challenges to deal with. You know, other than the initial stories about Jesus’ birth, the Bible doesn’t say much about Joseph, Mary’s husband and the earthly step-father of Jesus. But, the Gospels record three events that are significant for us to look at in respect to Joseph. All three of these events had to do with dreams where an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to give him guidance and direction and I’m sure he had some “*Now What?*” moments.

<sup>18</sup> *The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. <sup>20</sup> But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”<sup>24</sup> When Joseph got up from sleeping, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her <sup>25</sup> but did not know her intimately until she gave birth to a son. And he named Him Jesus.*

Matthew 1:18-25 HCSB

Joseph chose to **open his heart to God’s will**. He also chose to **hold tight to God’s promise**.

Joseph's second "Now What?" moment probably came at a time when he thought things were moving along pretty well and life had settled down!

*After they were gone, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy Him." So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called My Son.*

Matthew 2:13-15 HCSB

In today's world it's difficult to discern God's will for our lives. Not too often do we have an angel of the Lord come to us in a dream to tell us what to do. So, how are we able to find God's will for our own lives during difficult times? I think the secret is revealed in Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Romans 12:1-3 NIV

Of course, a big part of discerning God's will for your life comes from the fact that after Jesus died, and rose from the grave, He sent the Holy Spirit into the world to lead, guide and direct the lives of all Christians who take the time to listen and obediently follow the path God wants us to follow. Joseph listened and he knew he had to Heed God's Warnings! He took the necessary steps to ensure his families safety and well-being. We need to do the same.

Joseph's third "Now What?" moment is found in the following scripture:

<sup>19</sup> *After Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,*  
<sup>20</sup> *saying, "Get up! Take the child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, because those who sought the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and His mother, and entered the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to*

*the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that He will be called a Nazarene.* Matthew 2:19-23 NKJV

**Joseph continued to live life** as he depended on God's direction and guidance. Open Your Heart to God's Voice and be willing to walk with obedient confidence.

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens **the door**, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* Revelations 3:20 NKJV

*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Romans 8:28-29 HCSB

Trusting in His mercy and grace are key to being able to continue living with hope for tomorrow. I'm reminded of a story I've shared on numerous occasions that is relevant to this discussion.

*There was a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given just a short time to live. As she was getting her things in order, she contacted her Pastor and had him come to her house to discuss the particulars of her final wishes and the celebration of her life. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in and even how she wanted her hair styled. She felt like she had put everything in order, but as the Pastor was preparing to leave she suddenly remembered something very important that she forgot to share. "There's one more thing," she proclaimed. "This is one of the most important details," **"I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."***

*The Pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say. The woman then explained, "In all my years of attending church socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would always lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favorite part of the meal because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie alamode. Something delicious had been prepared for me and I was about to indulge in an exquisite culinary delight!" So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder "What's with the fork?" Then I want you to tell them: "Keep their fork, because the best is yet to come."*

The most important thing to remember in times like this is that we must **hold tight to God's Promise!** *The best is yet to come!* That's what Mary and Joseph believed during those early days surrounding the birth of our Savior. They took God at His Word and held tight to His Promise - the Promise and the purpose of Jesus Christ. They firmly grasped the promise of God's mercy and grace. The gift that brought salvation to the world. They believed *the best was yet to come!*

When things suddenly and without warning change in our lives, and we feel like we're in another one of those "Now What?" moments, it's easy to get anxious and confused – not knowing for sure what we should do. Here's the secret on how to respond.

*<sup>6</sup>Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup>and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV*

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. <sup>9</sup>The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:6-10 NKJV*

So, "Now What?" What do you do with all of this? What do you do when the realities of this current situation seem to overwhelm you? What do you do when panic and fear seem to engulf the very essence of your being? You hang onto your faith just like Job did and you follow the example of both Mary and Joseph. You **trust in the Lord** and place your hope in Him. You **rest in the assurance that God is still in control.** That is how you will find peace as you deal with the overwhelming situations of life.

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. <sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>8</sup>But God*

*demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:1-6, 8 NIV

*God loves you so much that He sent His only Son so that whoever believed on Him would not perish but have everlasting life. God sent His son Jesus into this world, not to judge the world, but that through Him the world might be saved. As we are living in a moment unlike anything any of us have ever experienced, remember to lift up your eyes to the One from where your help comes. (Psalm 121:1)*

*... his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may stay for the night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5b (NIV)*