

A light blue surgical mask lies on a concrete sidewalk. The background is a blurred city street with green trees and a red traffic light.

RESTARTING THE WORLD

A NEW NORMAL AFTER A PANDEMIC

H. NORMAN WRIGHT
AND BRYN EDWARDS

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CHAPTER 1

The World Stood Still

No one knew what was about to take place. The year 2020 began like any other year—with New Year’s resolutions and hopes and dreams abounding from coast to coast. Yet 2020 held more unpleasant surprises than anyone could have imagined.

We hear about events throughout the nation with real-time communication and media coverage, and we have seen many tragedies and storms unfold across our country in the past few years. In California it’s the yearly firestorms or the threat of the “Big One” that could happen at any moment. More than thirty years ago, I experienced an earthquake while playing racquetball with a friend. At first, I thought the aerobics class on the floor above was louder than usual, but realized it was more when the walls began to sway back and forth. When the lights went out,

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my friend and I ran for the door and grasped to find the recessed door handle, shattering a few fingernails in our haste. Hearts pounding, we ran outside as the ground continued to shake. We later learned we were seven miles from the epicenter of the 5.9 quake that caused several fires, injured many people, and caused eight deaths.

Hurricanes flood the Gulf and East Coast causing millions of dollars' worth of damage, and the Midwest experiences devastating tornadoes. And tornadoes are not always limited to the Midwest. Several years ago, we experienced a full-sized twister on our street in southern California. My wife, Joyce, was working in the yard and felt some strange and strong winds. Realizing something was wrong, she went inside and shut the door. The winds continued, and it seemed as if the air was being sucked out of the house. Not knowing what was happening, she shut herself in an inside room. About this time a neighbor turned the corner on her way home just in time to see the twister set down in the middle of the block and come toward her. She drove her car into the garage and ran into the house before the tornado ripped the large trees from her front yard.

Mass shootings happen all too often and tragically disrupt communities taking the lives of the innocent. I've ministered to victims and communities after these tragedies have taken place throughout the country, and I spent more than a year helping twenty-one students and staff members deal with the trauma at

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a local high school where a student was shot and wounded by another student. These events break our hearts and each time we lose a little more of our sense of security, but the vast majority of our population is not personally affected.

Who would have imagined that several individuals gathering at an airport on a Sunday morning to travel to a girl's youth basketball tournament would never reach their destination? When we heard the story, time seemed to slow down. On January 26, 2020, we lost a legend—a basketball player known for his God-given ability, drive, competitiveness, and generosity. He was an icon to a generation of athletes and a pillar in the sports world, due to his twenty-year career on the Los Angeles Lakers. Kobe Bryant was not alone in the helicopter crash that killed eight other people besides himself. I ministered to some of those who were directly affected by this tragic loss—relatives, classmates, teachers, and friends. The ripple effects impacted the family members and friends of each person who died that day. As a country we collectively grieved this tragedy, not realizing there was an unforeseen event on the horizon that would affect us as a nation in ways we had not experienced in our lifetime. This was a new type of storm. It was quiet. It was subtle. It crept in without our knowing its presence.

It started as a rumbling. We were learning about the Coronavirus in bits and pieces as it infected many people in China and started making its way through Europe. Little did we know

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the entire country would soon be shutting down, and for much longer than anyone suspected. Schools throughout the country sent students home with plans for them to return to school a few weeks later. Restrictions on gathering affected every area of our lives. Many businesses shut their doors, and employees were sent home not knowing when they would be returning to work.

Daily the news changed. It was recommended that anyone over the age of sixty-five “shelter in place” and avoid public places. The term *defiant elderly* was given to the senior citizens who chose not to stay at home and continued to go about their daily business. Before we knew it, a *quarantine* with no specific end in sight was put in place for the residents in many states, and we were told to only leave the house when necessary. Life as we knew it completely changed. The pandemic had landed in America, and the news we were hearing was not good. New York, especially New York City, was seeing high numbers of people diagnosed with COVID-19 daily—and this was expected to hit the rest of the states in the same manner. We asked ourselves questions, wondering how this would affect our families. *Will I get COVID-19? Will I die? Will someone in my family die? When will life return to normal? When will I return to work?*

Where were you when the world stopped? There is no other way to describe the numb feeling. We vacillate from belief to unbelief, from acceptance to denial, wondering what went wrong and what the future will hold. And at times it feels like the earth

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is standing still. With the shelter-in-place order, the busyness of our daily lives came to a halt.

There was another day that felt like the earth stood still—September 11, 2001. We watched our televisions as the tragic events unfolded. In October, I went to New York to minister to those who had experienced firsthand the destruction that was left from the falling towers. It seems like it was just yesterday, and the current events bring it back to mind because of the devastation COVID-19 has caused. But I also remember a night in November 2001—the TV was on, but this time the news wasn't replaying the collapsing towers; this time country singer Alan Jackson was debuting his new song “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning).” The words touched me emotionally since I knew personally how lives had been changed. And as the nation healed from an uncontrollable event, we prayed this wouldn't happen again.

Most of us believe that we are in control of our lives—that is, until a tragedy strikes. We learned that in September 2001, and we learned it again in March 2020. The control we thought we had was taken from us along with our sense of well-being. The loss of control affects us in many ways: fear, anxiety, frustration, insecurity, anger, loss, and loneliness (created by the stay-at-home orders and social distancing). But there is a flip side to losing control—learning to be content in all circumstances, trusting completely that God is in control, and sharing this hope with others.

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The United States spent more than an entire year watching the ebb and flow of COVID-19 as the number of infections and deaths rose and fell intermittently. We don't know what the future will hold. As we immerse from the isolation, life will be different. We wonder if it's over or if it will rear its ugly head again; will it disappear completely or be followed by an even worse pandemic in the future? As you read through this book, let's look at both the good and the bad, finding new ways to cope with uncertainty and loss of control.

Even in the midst of chaos, we can still find hope and find peace. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

The results are positive. The plane crashes. The pandemic hits. Your world—maybe even the whole world comes to an abrupt halt. How do you keep going? How do you process the emotions? And more than that, how do you find a new normal in the world you emerge into?

The world may be restarting and opening its doors, but the effects of the grief, isolation, anxiety, and anger are anything but over.

In this brief but powerful book, Dr. H Norman Wright, Christian grief and trauma therapist and author of *Experiencing Grief*, along with coauthor, Bryn Edwards, help readers to process through the emotional toll that the pandemic shutdown has taken, and gives readers practical tips, tools, and exercises to not only reenter the world stronger, but make them better prepared to handle the unexpected.

Even in the midst of chaos, we can still find hope and peace. “*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 15:13 CSB).


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