I trust that you have been stirred by this challenging message from Dr. Tony Evans for challenging times. What a timely reminder to us to do what the church does best and has been called to do, which is to be salt and light in our culture.

The point of the message is hard to miss: Even amid all the problems and challenges of a secular society, the searchlight of God’s Word is always focused on His people. Too often, our light has been dimmed and our salt has lost some of its potency.

But I appreciate the fact that Tony had a word of hope for us. I heard a statement one time in the context of suffering, which said that God has no bad plans. If they are God’s plans, they are good plans, even if discipline is involved.

In spite of the discipline that God may bring on a disobedient world, His promise for the believer is a promise of good even in the midst of tough times. The promise of Jeremiah 29 reflects Dallas Seminary’s firm conviction that we will trust and serve God and look to His faithfulness regardless of the environment or circumstances.

I appreciate Tony Evans for his message and his ministry. He has modeled what he preaches in his home, the church, and the community. And I am equally grateful for another Dallas Seminary alumnus, Dr. Erwin Lutzer, whose insightful book we are offering you in this issue of Veritas.

Let me close with a word of appreciation for you. Our supporters are like fans for Dallas Seminary—boosters in the stands who encourage us to take another lap as we pursue ministry and ministry training. Friends like you who have wrapped themselves around the Seminary in love, prayer, and support are deeply appreciated!
Dr. Tony Evans is founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. He is also founder and president of The Urban Alternative, a national organization that seeks to bring about spiritual renewal in urban America through the church.

The Urban Alternative’s radio broadcast, The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans, can be heard on more than 500 stations daily throughout the United States and in more than 40 countries worldwide. Dr. Evans has also served as an associate professor in the Pastoral Ministries department of Dallas Theological Seminary and was chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys. He is currently the chaplain for the Dallas Mavericks.

Dr. Evans received his B.A. degree from Carver Bible College and also holds the Th.M. and Th.D. degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Lois, have four children and nine grandchildren.

Finding Hope for Today’s Challenges

Being caught up in the New York City blackout in the summer of 2003 gave Dr. Tony Evans an opportunity to experience firsthand the importance of having a light in the darkness. In this powerful message he delivered during a recent chapel service at Dallas Seminary, Dr. Evans turns to a dark period in Israel’s history—their conquest by a foreign power and exile to Babylon—to bring a message of hope for the challenging times we face today. Because of God’s unending faithfulness to His people, we cannot only survive but thrive as God’s people even in the worst of circumstances around us.
My wife, Lois, and I were on our way home from a time of rest and relaxation in New York City on August 14, 2003, when we encountered a problem at LaGuardia airport. We had stood in the curbside check-in line with little movement for about 20 minutes, so I walked up to the front to see what was going on, only to discover that the airport had no power. Nothing was working.

After about two hours, we were told that there had been a problem at a power station in Canada. One of the power grids had shut down, and we found ourselves in the New York City blackout of 2003.

A Darkened City
As dusk began to set in, the announcement came that LaGuardia airport was shutting down. We needed a place to stay, and my assistant back in Dallas helped us find the one hotel room that was still available at the Crowne Plaza LaGuardia. We found a taxi and drove down the dark streets to the hotel. The lobby was lit by candles. We registered by hand, bought flashlights, and made our way to our room.

That’s when it happened. Lois wanted to see if we could open the window, because there was no air-conditioning. She pulled back the curtain of the hotel room, only to discover that immediately across the street was another hotel completely lit up. We opened the window and saw lights and heard music. We were in a whole lot of darkness where we were, but there was a whole lot of joy across the street.

I didn’t understand how there could be that much light in the midst of that much darkness. We walked over to this bright, air-conditioned hotel. They had televisions in the foyer with CNN talking about how dark New York was. There was a line waiting for hot food, which was not being served at our hotel. I finally found the assistant manager and said, “I don’t understand how there can be light in the midst of this darkness?”

He said he had been asked that all day, and it was simple. This hotel had its own backup generator. Therefore, they were not dependent on what was happening out there to determine what was going on in here. That generator gave the hotel the ability to transcend the darkness in which they found themselves.

Plenty of Darkness
You and I are living in a dark place. You can pick the area, and it’s dark. Whether it’s the disintegration of the family, the economy, or health care, you can pick the subject and there is usually a pretty dark cloud surrounding it. The question is, “Is there any light in the middle of this seemingly hopeless environment we find ourselves living in and having to minister in?”

There is light, and I find it in a great verse that many Christians know and quote regularly—Jeremiah 29:11, where God says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” That’s an awesome verse in a bad chapter. Jeremiah 29 isn’t a pleasant chapter. It was addressed to the people of Israel who had been taken away into captivity in Babylon.

God told His people that He had sent them into exile. Because of their unfaithfulness to God, He put them in a place of judgment in a secular society where they would now have to live in the midst of a people who did not share their worldview or their belief system. If you are depressed,
don’t read the Book of Jeremiah for devotions. This book is one sad chapter after another because the context is exile in a hostile land. So the question comes to us again: How do we find light that keeps us moving on and ministering when there is so much darkness around us and in us?

**God Has a Plan**

God told the people that this was a bad place where He had put them, but nevertheless they were to seek the peace and the welfare of that place (Jer. 29:7). But in the midst of this sad chapter, we find this great verse, verse 11, where God says, “I have a plan for you.” One thing you need to know about hope is that it is always future-oriented. Where I am going as a child of God is better than where I have been.

Hope has to do with an expectation that ahead of us is something worth moving toward. You can go a long way even if the only thing you have to get you there is hope. God says, “In spite of where you are and what you are going through, I have a plan for you.” One reason Jeremiah wrote to the exiles is that a false prophet named Shemaiah was telling the people that God would intervene at any moment and they would be going home. These false prophecies had created social inertia among the Israelites, who thought they could be passive in the midst of a secular society because they would soon be out of there. But God’s judgment was 70 years of exile, so the people needed to get busy making a life and a difference in Babylon.

**Failing to Be Light**

Part of God’s plan for Israel was to put them in a situation in which they would have to address what was wrong with them, not just what was wrong with society. Much of what’s wrong in America has very little to do with who’s in the White House or the state house. We find ourselves where we are in America today because the people of God have not been what we have been called to be. I believe we are in these challenging and dark times because the church of Jesus Christ, like Israel of old, has not taken seriously its calling and its mandate. Therefore, we have allowed ourselves to be exiled to the secularism of our day.

**Doing Something Special**

But God has a plan. In the midst of all the chaos, He is still doing something special. Part of that plan includes a wake-up call to the church. That’s why He says in Jeremiah 29:12–13, “ ‘Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’ ” In other words, God has us in a bad place to drive us back to Him.

When I met my wife, I was an 18-year-old in Baltimore. She was pretty, and I began talking to her. However, she was not responding at the rate to which I was accustomed, so I had to help a sister out. I took her to an amusement park where they had a ride called the Wild Mouse. This thing not only did the big dips that all roller coasters do, but it would also shoot out to the edge and turn back in suddenly. The
wilder the ride got, the closer Lois got to me. By the time the ride was over, you would have thought only one person was in that car!

What I did was create a dilemma that caused Lois to draw near, and she’s been hanging out with me now for 33 years. God knows how to create scenarios of darkness to draw us near, so He can bring about the plan that He has for us. God knows that He cannot entrust His empowering work to His people until they have been made ready to receive it. In order to create something new, God will often do some demolishing to gain our attention and draw us near.

**God knows how to create scenarios of darkness to draw us near, so He can bring about the plan He has for us.**

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**Searching with Our Hearts**

One of the struggles I had when I was at Dallas Seminary was my struggle with knowledge. The problem was that I was learning more and fellowshipping with God less. I was discovering that my closeness to the Lord was being lost, while my knowledge about the Lord was being expanded.

That’s a problem God’s people had in exile. That’s why God told them they would not hear Him or find Him until they sought Him with all of their hearts. What God seeks is intimacy with His people so He can communicate His plan to them and entrust them with it.

When my daughter gave us our first grandson, she was in painful labor for 16 hours. Lois and I were in the room as we tried to comfort her. The labor went on and on, and finally the doctor said there was a problem. The baby’s head was turned the wrong way, so the doctor had to go inside the womb and turn the head. When the doctor went inside the womb, it was time for a delivery. There was extended labor because the head was in the wrong position. The life was present, but it wasn’t positioned correctly. God is allowing His church to be in labor, and He wants to bring about a delivery, but we must be in the right position.

Until the church reconnects with her Lord, we will not see what God can do with His people in the midst of a secular society. In Jeremiah 29:14, God concluded this particular message to His people by saying, “‘I will be found by you.’” In other words, “If you seek Me on My terms, I am going to let you find Me and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations from where I have driven you.”

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**Getting Our House in Order**

So let me say again, our problem is not in Washington. It is our house as the people of God. We have failed to be the people of God as the church of Jesus Christ and the collective representatives of God in history. God sometimes waits for His people to ask and then responds appropriately.

For some people, that statement might seem to infringe on God’s sovereignty. But His sovereignty is like the boundaries on a football field. These are the lines that do not move, the sovereign boundaries in which the game must operate. But although the boundaries are immovable because they are sovereign, there is freedom for gain or loss on the field, based on the choices of the coaches and
quarterbacks when they call the play. The boundaries on the field do not deny the choice, although the choices are confined by the sovereign limits established by those who govern the game.

God is sovereign, and He has created sovereign boundaries that He will not let human beings infringe upon. But He created freedom on the field. It is the choice of the church of Jesus Christ to be the people of God. That will determine what play God decides to call. So in this sense, God is waiting on the church to be His people in history in the midst of the secular society in which He has placed us. Just as Israel was to be the deliverer for the world of its day, the church in this age is to be used by God to bring about the transformation of society.

Keep the Brass Polished

Someone may ask, “Why polish brass on a sinking ship?” If this world is so dark and is heading to judgment, why should we seek its welfare and its prosperity by helping rebuild its economy and repair its broken-down walls? It is the same reason you work out even though you know you are going to die someday. You can’t let the reality of death keep you from living life to the fullest.

Our task as believers in Jesus Christ is to represent the interest of our King even in a pagan world. The beautiful thing about this is that when we are obedient to God even when everything is dark and there seems to be no hope, He can restore what was lost.

God’s plan is that in the modern-day Babylon in which we live, He wants to unleash His people to be the representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. When God’s people rise and reconnect with Him and one another, we will discover His plan for our blessing.

IN APPRECIATION FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF DALLAS SEMINARY

We are accustomed to think of Nazi Germany as the worst case of inhuman barbarism—never, we pray, to be repeated. But Dr. Erwin Lutzer, a Dallas Seminary graduate and a respected pastor and author, says we need to take another look at a dark period of history. The people of Nazi Germany weren’t any more barbaric, uncivilized, or depraved than any other Western nation of the early 20th century. Yet the Nazi regime was brutality and extreme racism run amok. What led to this?

In *When a Nation Forgets God*, Dr. Lutzer examines what happened in history and shows how more than a few benchmarks of Germany’s transition can be observed in present-day American society. He does not suggest that the United States is definitely marching toward authoritarian oblivion, but that we—especially we believers—must be vigilant in our stand for truth, justice, and righteousness. The parallels with history are real, but the conclusion is not a foregone one.

TO RECEIVE THIS RESOURCE AS OUR THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF DALLAS SEMINARY, USE THE ENCLOSED REPLY CARD (FOR SUBSCRIBERS) OR CALL 800.DTS.WORD x3724. THANK YOU!