

## **Merchants of Hope**

“The opportunity of a lifetime must be seized during the lifetime of the opportunity,” as someone once said.

Lockdown and post-lockdown present all of us with opportunities and choices.

It’s undeniable that there has been immense hardship and tragedy during these past few months and we all have the choice to look back or look forward, to bunker down or build, to lament or to hope.

The eyes of faith look beyond the present circumstances to a brighter future. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1).

We can choose to blame others for our present circumstances or we can get up, dust ourselves off and become merchants of hope.

How do we position ourselves to embrace the opportunities that will come our way?

How can we overcome a victim mind-set that has dragged many of us down to a place of hopelessness?

Temporary setbacks don’t have to hold you back permanently.

The lockdown has affected everyone. Many have lost and some have gained.

Solomon said, “The fastest runner doesn’t always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn’t always win the battle” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

This scripture should inspire all of us with hope because he ends verse 11 with these words, “but time and chance happen to them all”.

Despite our level of education, or the neighbourhood that we live in, economic opportunities do exist.

Even if we have had a difficult past, it doesn’t have to define our future. It’s therefore really important to overcome a victim mind-set.

When we have a victim mind-set, we end up looking for others to create opportunities for us, or we give up hope completely.

Many South Africans are victims of the past and this can easily become our default setting.

These feelings of helplessness and hopelessness could be exacerbated by lockdown setbacks. Many jobs have been lost and many are living in desperate circumstances.

Over and above physical loss, many are experiencing emotional burnout.

Thoughts and feelings of abandonment and rejection are often referred to as an orphan mind-set.

Once again, we need to reject those thoughts because the truth is that we are loved by our Heavenly Father.

We are sons and daughters, adopted into His Family as John 14:18 says "I will not abandon you as orphans”.

The power of prayer and the renewing of our minds can help us overcome these destructive mind-sets.

Paul's advice is: "let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Romans 12:2).

Embracing humbleness is critical for us; the truth is that we aren't in control, and to acknowledge our need and dependence on Jesus is vital. He said, "Blessed are the humble for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

We are not masters of our own destiny and every heart-beat is a gift from Him.

I pray that as you read this message and meditate on scripture, your mind will be renewed, and hope will begin to rise and take root in your life.

"We now have this light shining in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 4:7). As hope rises in your heart, you will have the opportunity to spread hope to others. Undoubtedly, hope is infectious – more so than any virus. Jesus is our hope in a stormy time.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

I'd like to conclude with some practical advice.

Be aware of scams, con artists and dishonest people. Things that sound too good to be true could be traps to extort money from you.

It's also illegal to be asked to pay money in order to secure a job.

If you can't find a job, try to employ yourself.

God can bless a legitimate business - avoid illegal, "get rich quick schemes", and immoral or unethical ways of doing business.

"Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow" (Proverbs 13:11). Look for niche business opportunities and start with what you have.

"God gives you the power to gain wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18), so look to Him for business ideas.

Finally, believe that you can be successful, banishing those thoughts of doubt and failure from your mind.

Trust God completely, believing that He is for you and not against you.

Enjoy the journey, because success is not a destination.

Become an inspiration to others by adding value to society.

"When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices" (Proverbs 11:10).

Let us join together, offer hope and transform our city!

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