I’d like to share with you an excerpt from a book written by Viktor Frankl. Frankl, you may know, was a psychiatrist. From 1942 to 1945, he was imprisoned in Auschwitz and three other concentration camps. He noticed something about what enabled some prisoners to survive the ordeal when others didn’t. Here is what he wrote in *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually, this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate.… Usually, it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up. There he remained, lying in his own excreta, and nothing bothered him anymore.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Some prisoners lost hope. They failed to see anything beyond the barbed wire. They failed to dream about being liberated. When they lost faith in anything beyond the terrible circumstances of the moment, they sunk into despair, and death soon followed.

So it is. When we are in a crisis or life-threatening situation, if we fail to see anything hopeful beyond the crisis, we also sink into despair. We may literally and physically die. We may just die spiritually. But when we lose hope in a crisis, we lose a significant part of ourselves.

Yet there is always hope beyond the crisis – any crisis. Whether it’s a terminal illness, a job loss, a pandemic, or political and societal unrest, God is still with us. God is greater than the sickness, the economic loss, the pandemic, the turmoil.

The passage we read in Isaiah was written during the exile of the Israelites in Babylon. They had been taken from their homeland, moved to a new place, and not allowed to follow their own culture or continue as a people in the way they had been before. They were begin to forget who they were as people – culturally, but also as chosen people of God. They were exiled for a long time in this different place, and many of them were losing hope.

The second half of Isaiah 41:22 through verse 26 reads this way in the Message translation.

He (God) stretches out the skies like a canvas—  
    yes, like a tent canvas to live under.  
He ignores what all the princes say and do.  
    The rulers of the earth count for nothing.  
Princes and rulers don’t amount to much.  
    Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted,  
They shrivel when God blows on them.  
    Like flecks of chaff, they’re gone with the wind.

“So—who is like me?  
    Who holds a candle to me?” says The Holy.  
Look at the night skies:  
    Who do you think made all this?  
Who marches this army of stars out each night,  
    counts them off, calls each by name  
—so magnificent! so powerful!—  
    and never overlooks a single one?

God created the world. God was still in control of the world. The Babylonian’s rule over the Israelites would eventually be gone with the wind.

It’s the same for us. Politics, the unrest, the economy, and the virus mean nothing when compared to the power of God – God who puts every star in the sky every night and knows each one of them by name. If God is this constant and intimate with the stars, how much more personal and constant is he with us?

One of my favorite things to do when I am feeling overwhelmed or down is to go to a place of retreat that’s far outside the city lights. Then I’ll go outside and look up at the sky that is filled with stars. I find that peaceful and hopeful – a reminder of God with me and a reminder that God is constant and a reminder that I also am created by God, loved by God, and that my identity and history is with God.

We’ve been in an exile of sorts for a long time – what may seem like forever. We can’t do those things we used to do without thinking because of the virus. Some of us have lost loved ones to the virus. We’re experiencing a sense of dis-ease with what’s going on around us – whether it’s politics, protests, violence, or other unrest. We may feel our lives are out of control.

Yet, they aren’t. We can choose to look beyond the barbed wire. We can choose to look at the stars instead and to think about how they show us that God is with us. God created the stars, and God created us. We are who we are because of God. That’s our story as individuals. That’s our story as a community of faith.

When we remember our identity as people created by God and loved so much that God died for us, we allow God to renew us and to give us strength. We allow God to heal us.

The princes of the world, the exiles, the diseases are temporary. God is forever.

1. Ortlund, R. C., Jr., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). [*Isaiah: God saves sinners*](https://ref.ly/logosres/prwdis?ref=Bible.Is40.27-31) (p. 249). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books quoting Frankl, Viktor in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, published 1959 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)