

Introduction: Welcome to Engage 360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life-changing truth of scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, hello again, friends, this is Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. I'm Don Payne. Glad to be your host for this. One of my sons recently pointed out to me that Yellowstone National Park sits on a massive volcano that if it erupts, it could potentially destroy all life on earth. Geologists are monitoring it. Now how's that to give you something else to worry about apocalyptic scenarios are not new even in the broader culture, but for some reason, they seem to have been especially prevalent in the Christian world throughout history. And that's for some good reason, because as Christians, we live with the promise that God will bring human history to a resolution and that something apocalyptic is involved in that resolution of human history. So, our hope can be laced with some considerable apprehension. Interestingly, however, for, for lots of Christians, this apprehension, this fear seems to dominate the hope and whatever one's particular theology or eschatology about the end times. It's really easy to get preoccupied with fear with this general sense this unnerving preoccupation that the world is completely falling apart. And we have lots of anger increasing anger and indignation and tension. So, we're really glad to have with us in this episode, two of our previous guests on Engage 360 Dr. Marshall Shelley and Dr. Angie ward. Welcome back.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Thank you. Good to be back.

Dr. Angie Ward: Thank you.

Dr. Don Payne: As you may remember Dr. Shelley is the director of our doctor of ministry program and Dr. Ward is the assistant director of that doctor of ministry program. Angie just served as editor of a newly released book entitled When the Universe Cracks; Living as God's People in Times of Crisis, I think just released by Nav Press?

Dr. Angie Ward: Correct.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Angie tells us a little bit about the book overall?

Dr. Angie Ward: Yeah, so you know, it's born out of the pandemic, but not you know, not restricted to the pandemic. So, about a year ago, Nav Press approached me and talked about what if we do a book that's about crisis in general and how the church has responded historically and how that informs how the people of Christ should respond today. And so, we envisioned it as this conversation as part of a series, the first of a series called kingdom conversations. And so, in it there's 10 different contributors, 10 chapters with a flow starting with is crisis. And then looking at what, what have we seen in history through Jesus' example through Bible biblical theological lens, and then what does that mean for us individually and as a collective body of Christ

Dr. Don Payne: I appreciate that overview. And as we begin to kind of focus on some parts of what is presented to us in this book, there's a one comment particularly that's captivating from chapter five, we're showing Gladding draws us to Jeremiah 29, where God tells his people that they will be an exile for a long time and that an immediate rescue is not forthcoming and that they should settle down and make a life in Babylon. And God charges them to, and here I'll quote, seek the welfare of the city where I've sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for, in its welfare lies your welfare. What kind of implications do you think in general that, that text has for some of the times that we're inhabiting right now with all of the fears and the apocalyptic scenarios and the preoccupations that even Christians can have, because of that?

Dr. Angie Ward: I think when we're in a crack in the universe moment, we don't know what's happening. So, we feel the earth shake and, and our tendency is to kind of, you know, protect ourselves, of course, in order to respond and fear. But as Sean says in that chapter, you know, from, from the example of the Israelites and exile that doesn't, we shouldn't cower in fear. There's, you know, Sean talks about how they said we wept when we remembered, you know, Jerusalem in our Homeland, but at the same time, so there's a lament there, but at the same time, there's a seeking of a flourishing in the context that they're in.

Dr. Don Payne: Marshall, you contributed chapter four to the book, it's called a brief history of crisis. And I was fascinated by the overview you did, tell us a bit about how the times we inhabit are really a lot like other times in history?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, I think we often forget how often crisis comes throughout history and particularly for Christians. My dad wrote a history of the church, a book called Church History in plain language. And I was haunted by the first line of that book. You know, when I first read it, I thought, wow, dad, you nailed it with your first one of those memorable first lines. He said, Christianity is the only religion which has as its central event the humiliation of its God. God comes to earth and is humiliated, shamed, flogged, killed. And that is the, that's the opening act of Christianity on planet earth. And I thought that starts with a crisis. When Jesus Christ was crucified, that's about as big a crisis as there is. And that was I'm sure a disillusioning and confusing to the disciples.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. I mean, they certainly thought their world, as they knew it had come to an end, everything they had built their lives around since beginning to follow the Messiah, right.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Right. So, Christianity requires and those of us who are evangelicals, who believe in a conversion have often considered that a u crisis, a good crisis when one was come to a point of recognition, that all is not well in my world. I am on a road that is heading toward destruction, and I need to repent. I need to turn my life over to someone else by the steering wheel to take me in another direction. And that's called conversion. That's the new birth, that's regeneration. So that's that kind of crisis is at the very heart of who we are as God's people.

Dr. Don Payne: What have been some of the crises throughout history that have really captured your attention and that you think form the pattern that we need to pay attention to?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, let's, yeah, let's just think about that early, you know, after Jesus says, after Jesus' crucifixion, obviously his resurrection came and then his Ascension, which I'm sure was another bit of a crisis. And the disciples were sitting there in the upper room waiting for what's next, which was the coming of the holy spirit, that happened at Pentecost. Some, you know, little over a month and a half later.

Dr. Don Payne: I hadn't thought quite this way before, but, you know, there's this crisis, he, he dies, but then he's back, but then he leaves again, he's here, he's gone. He's here. He's gone.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm sure there were some unsettledness on this, but then very, very quickly after the you know, after those various forms of persecution begin. The martyrdom of Stephen just being one of them, but in the 300 years after Christ's life, there were lots of lots of eras of persecution, some very severe. So, there was that crisis that the church had to follow. There was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, you know, which was a crisis for everybody who lived in greater Israel when the Romans came and destroyed that the center of their worship, their worship life was suddenly gone. And that was a life life-changing, a tradition changing event. And obviously that helped lead to the dispersion of Christians around the world. But that was a crisis. You look after Constantine becomes a Christian, there is a crisis of identity. Christians who were a marginalized people are now suddenly the Privileged.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, we're the mainstream now.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: You go from your faith being something that you're persecuted for, to your faith, being an asset to your career. If you share the faith with the emperor, that's good. There's some social benefit to that. And how do you as Christians then handle people who are dissidents within your own movement? How do you exercise faithfully and well, the new found power that you have, and some Christians handled the newfound power well, and others abused power fairly quickly? And persecuting those who were not as Orthodox as you know, they would have wished. So, you know, crisis has been having been fairly frequent there. We're not even getting to the, you know, the fall of Rome or the, the plagues later in history or various other crises.

Dr. Don Payne: I want to come back and talk about those plagues, because there's maybe an eerie similarity between that and what we've been going through internationally in the last couple of years. But it struck me as you were talking Marshall, that you're defining crisis in a particular way, because you even talked about our conversion as a crisis at this turning. And the dispersion of Christians early Christians into the broader parts of Asia minor as a crisis, which many

good things came out of that, but you seem to be working with a broader definition of crisis than simply things that go really bad. Is that fair?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yes. Yes. I would say a crisis, at least what I was talking about in this chapter, I realized there's another chapter that, that goes into greater detail in defining a crisis in the book that an Angie's edited, but for this chapter, I was defining crisis as a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger that requires a response. It requires some form of what are we going to do about this? And you know, what's the old saying a leader is someone who keeps his points when people all around him are losing theirs. A crisis is a time when people tend to lose their cool, lose, their bearings. Think that now is a time to set aside all of normal life and we have to act abnormally. And that's, I think that's what I was assuming as a crisis. It's intense pressure. It is a time when we think things can go badly wrong. And have to respond somehow to the circumstances that are creating this crisis.

Dr. Don Payne: And intense decisions are on the table one way or the other. Right. Right. And so, it's kind of a poignant, a loaded time for us when a lots at stake, and things can go in a variety of directions, I suppose. Let's circle back to the plaque. Cause I know you, you mentioned that in your historical timeline and what went on then that might be instructive for us in some fashion even now.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yeah. Let me take you back to the 13 hundreds. In 1347 according to one account that I was reading, in all likelihood, a flea was riding on the height of a black rat on a ship that entered the Italian port of Mussina. And on that ship, on that ship, which had come from, you know, the, basically the black sea where the Mongol hordes had been not, not too long ago. So, there's even some speculation that this bacterium that was on the flea came from Asia, from the Mongol hoards that had been moving westward. And with that rat, the flea and the bacillus came the most feared plague on record. And you know, between 1347 and 1353, just a six-year period, the black death killed a third of the population of Europe. We think, you know, the COVID virus has a death toll and it does, but the black death was so much more severe at that time. So approximately 20 million people died as a result of that. And it was a gruesome, a gruesome plague. Black swellings, the size of eggs in your armpit and your groin, swellings that whose blood and puss spreading boils and black splotches on the skin. So it was a grotesque kind of thing, and people would die five days from the first symptoms. So, it was very quick.

Dr. Angie Ward: Isn't this a family show?

Dr. Don Payne: Not anymore.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yeah. Well yeah, it is gruesome. It was a horrible thing. And it was fear inducing and some Christians responded well to these horrible crisis conditions and other Christians responded very poorly.

Dr. Don Payne: I was going to ask you about that because I remember that part of your chapter where it was really a mixed bag in terms of how the church responded, how clergy responded. And I think you mentioned a pretty chilling stat about the number or the percentages of priests and, or maybe other clergy who died of the plague.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, on the, on the downside one reporter at that time said that magistrates and notaries refuse to come and make the wills of those who are dying because they were contagious. So they were refused services of even writing their will. Even priests at times, did not come to hear confessions in one account. The author said, brother was forsaken by brother, oftentimes husbands by wives, nay, what is more and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children to their fate when the children became infected. Unvisited as if they had been strangers, just a time of such fear and panic that people were abandoning one another to their fate. But at the same time, on the flip side, many faithful priests and nuns and friars, bravely ministered to the sick and dying during that time you know, the unfortunate fact is that attrition among the good and the brave and the faithful was greater than it was in the general population, because they were putting themselves in harm's way. Truly faith was being exercised by those who were willing to minister to the infected. In some ways, you know, much like our first responders and hospital staffs today being willing to serve even in, even in harm's way. So while 30% of the general population died between 45 and 50% of priests, nuns and friars died during that same time.

Dr. Don Payne: What do you think we need to be taking from incidents like this timelines, like you've put together, or other observations other authors in the book have made about when the universe cracks or seems to be falling apart? What do we need to be taken away from this?

Dr. Angie Ward: Well, one is you know, as Marshall has pointed out in his chapter and here, this is nothing new. And so you know, we tend to think, I think, especially, in Western affluent culture, that some point we'll get beyond this. You think back a hundred years ago, my grandfather had to come home from the university of Wisconsin from his studies because of the influenza pandemic, a hundred years later, my two college sons had to come home from Indiana University. That's not, we go, that happened in the past. And so it's just a reminder that this type of thing is nothing new nine. It's not just the pandemic type stuff, just crisis in the life of the church. But that there are tasks and ministry to be done just like in the time of the plagues and the black death. There are even greater needs for us to meet as the body of Christ and just show the love of Christ to people during this time of crisis.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Going back to the statement made earlier about you know; leaders are those who keep their poise when all the world around them is losing theirs. I think faithfulness, what it means to be a Christian is that in times of crisis, you are willing to continue to do what your calling was before the crisis. A crisis is not a time to jettison your Christian responsibilities and Christian opportunities. We,

of all people ought to be fearless in the face of death. We have a savior who faced death and overcame it. And throughout the centuries, this has been the dividing line, if you will, between those who have a living faith and those who have a convenient faith, that death has no fear for those who recognize that my life is not my own, it belongs to my savior. Now, that sounds harsh. That sounds like, you know, we shouldn't take extreme measures to preserve our life. And it's very understandable, but I think Christians, at least throughout history have had many examples of people who are willing to hold their life lightly in their hands.

It says this life is not my own. I'm willing to give it up in the cause of Christ and being able to faithfully continue in, what does Paul say? A lot of things are going to pass away as for knowledge, it will pass away, as for tongues, they will pass away, but these three remain; faith, and hope, and love. The greatest of these is love and a crisis doesn't change any of that. It just makes it way more conspicuous when people are willing to follow in a life of faith, being true, trusting that God is going to care for me in the midst of whatever circumstance I'm in. Even if it means my death, our hope is in the resurrection of Christ. Whether we're in a crisis or not, our hope is in Christ resurrection, and whether we're in a crisis or not, can we act with love and not selfishness? I know that's easy to say really hard to hear, but I think that's what the example of Jesus and the faithful disciples is all about.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, that's probably one of the real sticking points for lots and lots of believers who have, in various ways been conditioned to believe that hope, the hope we're given is really a hope that things won't get any worse or things won't get as bad for us as they might for somebody else. Or that they won't get as bad as they could get. But, you know, when you look back at the example in the stats you cited from the black plague got worse for Christians than it did for others because they put themselves in harms way.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: And those faithful priests and nuns and friars did not have unusually high percentages of survival. In fact, it was the worst. They were putting themselves at risk and they died, but their hope was not in an extended life. Their hope was in a resurrection.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. So, if we don't have guarantees that things won't get worse because maybe they will. I mean, we just don't know, but if we don't have that kind of guarantee, then how does that kind of dial in the type of hope that is supposed to undergird our lives?

Dr. Angie Ward: Yeah. This is a great question. You know, and as we explore in the book, some of the later chapters, it's just that the last chapter is God remains good, and that what, so what we're experiencing is normal and that God is in this. And as Marshall said, I mean, our hope is not in, we just have to change our focus. It's a reframing of our entire perspective from, from only earthly to kingdom the now and the not yet, you know? And so what do we do kingdom wise here while we're waiting for that, knowing that our hope is not just in relief of pain here on

earth? Well, how do we do that? And we'll try to do that, but realize that it's not till the full flourishing of the kingdom, that those things will be eradicated. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: Let's take this back to God's challenge or charge to his people in Jeremiah 29, settle in, build homes, work for the work for the good of the city. How does that kind of motif do you think help us live with just a settled miss or how does it help us be present?

Dr. Angie Ward: That's the word I was going to say? I just think presence is the key and, and, you know, not just the pandemic, but just the upheaval, you know, the book talking about political and protests and all that kind of thing. I think presence is going to become so continuing to become so much more important and powerful. And Catherine McNeil in her chapter, she talks about, he has shown you what is good. And, and it's that it's just to walk humbly, to act justly, to love mercy. And that's lived out in our presence in our you know, I think it's, I think COVID in many ways shrunk our world. You know, it's like we couldn't travel. So in one way, physically, it made our world smaller. But we couldn't see family and a lot of different, you know, go to work regularly, but that's not necessarily a bad thing because I think we were overlooking the needs and the relationships and the opportunities that were right in front of us to just be present instead of trying to accomplish or to conquer or to, we lost power in one sense as far as bigger picture. But I think we gain that opportunity for presence. I think presence is just such a key word. Like you said.

Dr. Don Payne: Somebody just recently gave me the phrase and I don't know if this came from ultimately from one of you, but realistic gratitude. That's a great word. What does it mean to live in times of crisis with realistic gratitude? Is that plausible and not just a bunch of words?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: I remember a number of years ago when I was about 10 years ago now, I went, I was feeling a little breathless, and I just couldn't catch my breath and went in the doctor said, oh, we need to do an angiogram. And so went in for the angiogram. And you know, when I woke up, after coming out of anesthesia, the doctor was there and I said well, how did it go? And he said, well we had a little irregularity. I said irregularity? How did you treat the irregularity? He said, oh, we had to get the paddles out. I said, the paddles?!

Dr. Don Payne: Well, your first clue should have been when, when he, his opening line was, well, that's always the word that in, oh, worst things you want to hear from a physician, right? Yeah. How about that?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: I said, so my heart stopped? And he said, well it was a condition incompatible with life. I said, where do they teach you guys to talk? Oh, no. I said, no, it was a tribulation. And you know, it, it, you, you could not have survived if it continued long. So we had to zap you with the paddles. And so, I had this, one of these moments that, so I came that close to you know, to leaving this world and that is sort of a sobering thing. Talk about realistic gratitude. It was, I'm grateful I'm here, but realistically I could have been gone very quickly. So that was on a

Thursday that Sunday I was in church and the pastors text was teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. And I thought, oh, boom, what are the chances? But it, it made me think of exactly that, that what does it mean to gain a heart of wisdom? Counting our days is not a morbid, you know, one of these days I'm going to die and how many I have one fewer day now than I did yesterday. It's not that, but it is I think, recognize that each day is an opportunity for realistic gratitude. God has placed us here for a reason, for us to exercise faith and hope and love one more time, one more day. And if this day is the last day that I have that opportunity, well, that's in God's hands. And I think wisdom is recognizing I'm, I'm willing to do what God has given me the capability of doing for as long as God chooses to let me do it. And beyond that, I'm in his presence doing his bidding in another world.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. And it's that note of presence, again, that the Lord qualitatively, the Lord is fully present to us in the moment, however, many of those moments quantitatively we get.

Dr. Angie Ward: Yeah. Well, you know, I love that phrase, Realistic gratitude. I think the other, another key to that is what reality are you getting your realistic from? You know, so the reality, if we're just focusing on the reality of our temporal world I think it's less prone to gratitude because we're seeing the hardness of life. But if the realistic gratitude is the realistic is a perspective, not just under the sun, but beyond into eternity then oh, okay. This is not the extent of it, you know? And so I think that's so depends on which reality your focusing on.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: So, part of numbering your days is recognizing that they are endless in the Presence of God.

Dr. Angie Ward: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: That's a good word. Angie, what are some of the other major contributions from other chapters in the book, other authors?

Dr. Angie Ward: Let's see. So we've talked about we have a sociologist from Wheaton starts by saying, what is crisis and what does it do to individuals and to society? And then we you know, Marshall has his chapter on church history. We have a pastor Lee [inaudible], all the voices. We wanted people, this is a discipleship book. I just want to kind of put that in there that working with Nav Press, it wasn't just four views or how do we think it was, it was like, how do we respond as followers of Christ? And so that's kind of the focus. So, we have a chapter of Pastor Lee [inaudible] saying, how did Jesus prepare us for this? You know, we talked about Sean Lettings chapter about looking at the people of Israel and the exile, how did they respond to this crisis? And then we start turning the corner to chapters about kind of what is this. Okay. So given all that, what does that mean for us in this time and this cultural missional moment?

And so, Joanne Lyon talks about from her experience working with the Wesleyan church in Rwanda and the importance of lament, and actually leads us through a time of like, it's okay to recognize the grieving. And that actually puts us in touch with the suffering of our brothers and sisters around the world. A friend Cuban Lee from Philadelphia Korean American, and he talks about rebuilding a church in the ruins. So it's appended all of our ways of life, including how we do church. He explores that. And then the last two, like I've talked about chapters are going well, God's shown us what is good. And God remains good. So God is always at work. He never wastes anything. I think that's, I think the ending is you know, we try to, as a hopeful trajectory, like we said, like a reality of the now and the not yet.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. So there's really something in this for lots of different readers and lots of different uses. Is this something that could be used maybe as a group discussion?

Dr. Angie Ward: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great point and question, at the back of the book, there's some discussion questions for each of the chapters. Yeah. Yeah. So it's meant to be, there's not going to be a companion kind of study, but those are built in to the book. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, a great conversation and a great work. I'm so glad y'all put this together again. It's entitled *When the Universe Cracks; Living as God's People in Times of Crisis*, just put out by Nav Press, edited general literature by Angie Ward. So good work on this and congratulations, and thanks for a great conversation, this a sobering one in some ways, but a realistically hopeful, grateful conversation that should give all of us as God's people, some, some real solid anchor points where we can not turn a blind eye to what's going on in the world, but neither do we have to be, or should we be dominated by that and preoccupied with that?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yeah. We shouldn't be paralyzed by fear when faith is the antidote.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Well, Dr. Marshall Shelley, Dr. Angie ward. Thanks. Thanks again for being with us on Engage 360. And want to thank all of you for spending a little bit of time with us and for your interest in not only Engage 360, but in Denver Seminary. We hope that you'll periodically visit our website, which by the way, we have a brand new website just launched. So if you go to that same address, denverseminary.edu, love for you to visit that because we've always got good resources there, whether you're a student here or not. But if you are or thinking about being a student or, you know, somebody who is thinking about being a student or, you know, somebody who ought to be thinking about being a student who wants you to. I'm going to try to cover everybody. Yeah. Yeah. I would love to interact with you through that. So feel free to email us here at podcastatdenverseminary.edu, if you have any feedback for us or questions or want to interact further about this topic or any of the topics we tackle with other guests. Remember also that we have full transcripts available for each of our episodes. Just go to our website and to the podcast link in the

website, you'll find all of our episodes there with a link or a tab or a clickable, something or other where you can download a full transcript of the episodes. Friends, we hope to talk to you again soon. May the Lord be with you and give you a lot of hope and a lot of realistic gratitude. Take care.