



THE COLLAPSE IS HERE

The Hopeful Christian's
Guide to Restore Faith,
Home and Community

GABE LYONS



PREFACE

Before you begin this journey, I want to warn you that what you are about to read may, at times, feel unsettling. You'll encounter facts and observations about the state of our world—technological, cultural, spiritual—that you may have sensed but not fully named. Some of it may confirm your quiet suspicions. Some of it may challenge your assumptions. And some of it may raise questions you would rather avoid.

That's understandable. Most of us would prefer not to think about collapse.

But this is not a book of despair. It is not written to provoke fear or to leave you overwhelmed by the challenges ahead. It is written to help you see clearly—and to respond wisely—with hope, courage, and conviction.

If you are a student of history, you know this is not the first time a civilization has faced collapse. And it is not the first time that Christians have lived through it—and been made stronger because of it. In the first century, Jesus himself warned of upheaval. Within a generation, Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed. Everything the people assumed was stable was shaken. Yet the early church did not disappear; it expanded.

Centuries later, the Roman Empire—the most powerful civilization the world had ever known—collapsed. Cities crumbled, systems failed, and order gave way to chaos. Again, the Christian church did not vanish. It persevered and grew.

Living through that season of collapse, a bishop named Augustine

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of Hippo penned *The City of God*, an epic tome that offers a framework that still holds today. He described two ways of living: what he called the *City of Man*—built on self-love, human ambition, and the illusion of control—and the *City of God*—built on love for God and ordered toward what is eternal. The former will always prove fragile, and the latter will endure.

Augustine understood something we are tempted to forget: **everything built by man will eventually collapse. But what is built on God, and by God, will endure.** As the centuries moved forward, this proved true again and again. In seasons of instability where structures gave way, Christian communities preserved what mattered most—truth, learning, cultivation of the land, care for the vulnerable, and a vision for human flourishing. Monasteries became places of refuge, and local churches became centers of renewal. What looked like collapse in one sense became the soil from which renewal emerged.

Empires rise. Empires fall. But the people of God remain. Not because they are stronger, smarter, or better resourced than everyone else, but because their hope is anchored in something deeper than any system or structure this world can offer.

The pages that follow are not just an exploration of our current collapse, but an invitation to participate in the kind of resilient, hopeful community that has carried Christians through every age of uncertainty before ours. You are not the first to walk this road, and you do not walk it alone.

That is the hope I want you to carry as you read this book. We will examine difficult realities—especially in Part One as we educate ourselves about the threats on the horizon. But hope is also on the threshold. In Part Two, we'll learn how to cultivate the skills we need to rebuild our lives and homes in the face of collapse, and Part Three equips us to create a resilient community to thrive as we live on in a flourishing way of life.

Yes, we will explore trends that are shaping the future in ways that

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should concern us. Yes, we will name the forces that are eroding our humanity, our communities, and our ability to live as we were designed by God. But we will not do so as people without hope. Because collapse, as unsettling as it may be, is not the end of the story. It is often the beginning of a new one.

—GABE LYONS

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ON THE EVE OF APOCALYPSE

The word apocalypse does not mean the end of the world;
it means the unveiling of what is hidden.

—N. T. WRIGHT¹

During the holiday season, my wife, Rebekah, and I look forward to hosting an annual Christmas party just outside of Nashville. It's attended by our amazing team at THINQ, an organization I founded and lead that helps people of faith think critically about the most pressing issues in culture and create conversations that lead to wisdom. Wearing our best velvet, plaids, reds, and greens, we enjoy a night of games, laughter, and a delicious ham and cranberry dinner.

At our most recent December soiree, I rounded the dining room corner and found myself eavesdropping on a surprising conversation. The Gen-Zers on our staff were leaned in, deep in a serious discussion. One by one, each person responded to the question, "Where would you go and what would you bring if the grid went down in Nashville?"

The answers were hilarious. One guy was grabbing his tent and driving as far as he could for the hills. Another gal was staying put with candles, flashlights, and bottled water. And another young couple were in complete disagreement. I could sense their anxiety building.

The wife confidently said, "We'd drive to my parents' house in Texas."

Her husband rolled his eyes and retorted, "That's not possible. How would we get gas?"

He continued, "I know—we would go to Jake's house [their prepper friend] and shore up with them."

She said, "Everyone will do that! There won't be room for all of us if things go south!"

The plans grew more complex and stress inducing—full of nervous

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laughter as the realization dawned that the worst-case scenario could one day be a heart-stopping reality.

This conversation isn't unique to our oddball Christmas parties. The kids are getting nervous. Whatever image you have in mind of an old, bearded prepper is now outdated. Over the past year, 39 percent of millennials and 40 percent of Gen-Zers spent money on disaster scenario prep, compared to 29 percent of the overall U.S. adult population.²

Maybe it's the relentless news cycles flooding our lives with crisis after crisis. Maybe it's the rising cost of living and stagnating wages. Whatever it is, conversations about an uncertain future are happening in coffee shops, on college campuses, around the office, and over dinner tables—not to mention on the internet. We're shrouded in a vague apocalyptic sixth sense that things aren't getting better, that we're headed toward some inevitable and disastrous conclusion.

Are you ready for what lies ahead?

Most people aren't. And Christians, of all people, need to be.

THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

The world around us feels increasingly unstable. The fallout from global conflict, out-of-control artificial intelligence, deepfakes and unreliable news, extreme weather events, pandemics, political violence, birth rate collapse, cyberattacks, nuclear buildup, terrorism, and food shortages create a gut-deep sense that key indicators are trending the wrong direction. And this is on top of the garden-variety pain that has always existed: food insecurity, poverty, and localized criminal activity.

To make matters worse, many Americans are losing faith in a better future. Since 1979, Gallup has measured American citizens' confidence levels in major institutions—including the church, our military, banks, Congress, the Supreme Court, and public schools. Over the past few years, optimism has declined sharply, reaching a near-record low

of only 28 percent of adults expressing confidence in the institutions that shape our country.³

The uncertainty is taking a personal toll. We are experiencing the highest levels of anxiety, loneliness, and stress ever measured. Today, 77 percent of Americans report that “the future of our nation is a significant source of stress in their lives.”⁴ Stressors like health, the environment, and making ends meet often send us into a state of paralysis. We helplessly scroll on our phones or plug in our headphones and turn up the music, welcoming any distraction to help us make it another day.

To my fellow believers: we *know* there is a better way to live. There has always been. It is the Christian mission in the world—to bring God’s way of doing things to the earth and to be a counterculture in a society that feels like it’s falling apart. God’s people have historically faced suffering with joy, whether it’s Joseph unjustly imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit, Daniel thrown to the lions, or countless martyrs whose blood was spilled to build the church. Persecution continues today in many countries, like Nigeria and Iran, where believers risk everything to follow Christ. In our current context, we are grounded not in a new hope, but in an old one that has carried us through the ages.

Now we must rise to the occasion again. My premise is that our culture and the community around us are beginning to experience what may prove to be the most dramatic technological, social, psychological, and spiritual shift in human history. In short, it will be a collapse of life as we know it. It will be filled with confusion and will require the utmost discernment and preparedness. And it has already begun.

If these sound like the ravings of a Bible-thumping conservative, consider that secular billionaires like Elon Musk, Sam Altman, Mark Zuckerberg, and Bill Foley are building bunkers, buying islands, and stockpiling rations. For the average person, those preparations feel a million miles (and millions of dollars) out of reach.

But survival isn’t the only concern. A far more terrifying scenario, in my opinion, is already unfolding. It is the slow, subtle erosion of our

humanity as we become more dependent on machines to think, remember, and mediate reality for us. All of which makes us susceptible to manipulation and dehumanization. Israeli philosopher and historian Yuval Noah Harari has made this bold claim:

We are probably one of the last generations of Homo sapiens, because in the coming generations, we will learn how to engineer bodies, brains, and minds. This will be the main product of the 21st-century economy—not textiles, not vehicles, not weapons, but bodies and brains. Those who control the data control the future of humanity.⁵

This isn't written by the screenwriters for *The Matrix*—Harari is one of the most influential intellectuals alive today and a leading authority on this matter. It's clear that we're on the cusp of a significant evolution.

And Harari isn't the first person to predict this massive shift. Nearly a century ago, British author C. S. Lewis wrote these words:

For the power of man to make himself what he pleases means the power of some men to make other men what they please. The process which, if not checked, will abolish Man. . . . Traditional values are to be “debunked,” and mankind is to be cut into some fresh shape at the will . . . of some few lucky people in one lucky generation which have learned how to do it.⁶

Back in 1943, Lewis warned of a future where humanity could gradually be abolished through a series of technologies and philosophies that remove the divine. He already had the prophetic eyes to see that as his nation shifted from agrarian to industrial, the impact would be felt far beyond the factory and into the human soul. Then, having witnessed the horrors of World War II, he understood the natural outcome of a

society intrigued with eugenics—a mindset resurging today through genetic engineering.

As we become more reliant on the systems we create and less reliant on the natural order of what God has established, we run the risk of dehumanizing ourselves and others. Lewis summarized, “Each advance leaves [man] weaker as well as stronger.”⁷ Every technological advancement comes with a trade-off, so we must constantly ask ourselves, “How high a price are we willing to pay?”

TWO TYPES OF COLLAPSE

While I am certain that the collapse is already here, I’m not certain it *feels* like a collapse as you might imagine it—at least not yet. As T. S. Eliot warned, “This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.”⁸

We are facing a twofold collapse: one is exterior and the other is interior. The exterior collapse will be dramatic and impossible to miss. It’s the undoing of our increasingly brittle and unreliable external structures, like politics and governance, the economy, supply chains, and even perhaps our power grid. But the interior collapse is the one Harari predicted. It’s the slow, subtle abolition of man as we merge with machines through overreliance and literal integration of tech in our bodies. Not just on, but *in*. The interior collapse is even more dangerous because propaganda convinces us that it is progress. The psychology shaping our imagination convinces us this is a better way to live.

Even if you’re not worried about a dystopian future, you’re likely already feeling the effects of the interior collapse. We have lost ourselves in some profound way. The disconnection, isolation, malaise, and meaninglessness you feel—these are the signs of the erosion of our humanity. We’re already becoming dumbed down, easily duped, outsourcing our critical thinking skills to AI, and divorcing ourselves

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from God's design for us to live as beings endowed with free will. As technology gains ubiquitous presence and strength, we become more susceptible to subversive controls while surrendering the essence of what it is to be human. The interior collapse is not a one-time event; it is a process.

These two collapses are connected. Resisting the interior collapse requires an inner strength and resolve to live by what is true. And to defend against and reform the exterior systems now under threat, we need the steadfastness and strength that only come through cultivating resilience in the face of interior collapse.

I write this book as a clarion call for all who feel the weight of these twin collapses—to serve as a field guide to fortify your strength, your heart, your mind, and your soul for what's coming next. The resilience we cultivate internally will help us withstand and navigate the failing of the external structures we assumed would always be in place. No one can do this alone, but together we can reimagine and build a future for human flourishing. The collapse is here, but it's not too late. I am overflowing with hope that we have everything we need to engage in this fight.

FEAR OR WISDOM?

I've always been quick to sound the alarm. Ask my wife, Rebekah, or any of our friends, and they'll report I'm naturally inclined to peer around corners and see what's coming. Even as a child, I felt a deep responsibility to help people prepare for their future.

I decided to put my faith in Jesus at age eleven, during my sixth-grade year. The evangelical zeitgeist in the late 1980s was obsessed with the end times and Jesus' return. Movies like *A Thief in the Night* painted a terrifying picture of a rapture event, where billions of Christians ascended into the heavens while most of the population suffered a terrible sequence of apocalyptic events. The idea of my friends or

family being left behind kept me up at night—literally. I'd lie awake in bed, scared that Jesus would return at any moment.

That anxiety motivated me. I'd sit in my basement and dial up friends from the Christian school I attended and warn them that Jesus might come back at any moment, concluding the awkward conversation with an urgent statement: "Get ready." I wanted to make sure they put their faith in Jesus, too, so they wouldn't be left behind to face the tribulation. I was reacting out of fear of an uncertain future and lacked proper guidance for how to process the change I thought was coming.

I wish I could travel back in time and tell eleven-year-old Gabe that Jesus doesn't lead with fear. He always leads with love. He sacrificed his life so we could enjoy a life of freedom. Today, I write from a place of confident hope in a God who knows the hour that everything will happen, equips his church with discernment, and is working on a better plan than we could imagine.

Speaking about the future can make us uncomfortable. And many of us are skeptical of doomsday prophets who claim to have a direct line to God. Rest assured, I don't have a divine secret, but I *do* have discernment and foresight honed through extensive research, reading, and conversations with subject matter experts and wise men and women who have their finger on the pulse of the changes we are living through. I read history, literature, current events, and—most importantly—Scripture, because the past is the best teacher for navigating the present and predicting the future.

Over the past decade, I've partnered with friends to build a resilient community in my hometown of Franklin, Tennessee, putting the principles in this book into practice. And leading THINQ Media means I get to create conversations on the most pressing issues for people of faith. This work has granted me the privilege of sitting with and learning from world-class leaders in the fields of science, technology, media, entertainment, government, education, and theology. In addition to concern about the current state of our world, these leaders

consistently assert a hopefulness that disruption can lead us to a better way of life.

THREE QUESTIONS TO NAVIGATE THE DAYS AHEAD

This book will raise many questions. Some will be answered, while others are an invitation to a deeper conversation. Many today have lost the ability to think critically, ponder, and investigate. To help frame our current situation from a theological, historical, and technological perspective, let's begin with three foundational questions.

Is Jesus Returning Soon?

The Christian faith teaches that Jesus Christ will return to earth in the “last days.” The final pages of Scripture are full of reassurance from Jesus himself that he will come back, which is why his followers have anticipated this event since the beginning.⁹ Even his disciples asked him to tell them when he'd return, hoping for insider info and special clues. But Jesus assured them: “About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”¹⁰ Despite no one knowing the timing, the belief that Jesus could return soon has remained as strong as ever.¹¹

Many different schools of thought exist on how the end times will play out and what Christ's “rule and reign” on earth will look like. Whatever view you hold, the Christian Scriptures indicate that the end time season will be a time of hardship and suffering. Followers of Jesus know to expect wars, persecution, false prophets, rampant wickedness, oppressive systems, and all sorts of anguish.

It's tempting to get lost in debate about the theological possibilities, but all of us must pay attention to Jesus' words in Matthew: “The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”¹² Jesus isn't concerned with decoding all the signs for us—his overarching message is to

remain steadfast, to endure, and to “keep watch”!¹³ Be alert and sober-minded. Practice discernment in the media you consume. Refuse to be emotionally manipulated. Faithfully carry out the work entrusted to you so that if Jesus were to return right now, he would find you living in a way that honors him.

While prophetic Christians warn we may be living in the end times, nonbelieving historians describe the current civilizational crisis through the lens of societal rise and collapse. Which leads to our second framing question.

Are We Living Through a Historical Turning?

Two prominent historians, William Strauss and Neil Howe, suggest that all civilizations follow a cyclical pattern of four distinct periods, which repeat every eighty to ninety years. They argue that American society is now at the end of the final cycle and is going through a life-shifting crisis.¹⁴

The first period is the *High*, which is marked by progress, growth, confidence, and stability. There’s a sense of unity and purpose, and citizens generally feel optimistic about the future.

In the second, the *Awakening*, people begin to question the established social order and commonly held values. It’s a time of political, spiritual, and social upheaval. Often, younger generations push back against the status quo and catalyze the changes they wish to see in culture.

Third, the *Unraveling* happens when societal structures begin to weaken. Social divisions become more intense, and the country experiences a breakdown of order and security. People feel fragmented. A growing skepticism of established institutions leads citizens to prioritize individual rights over the collective good.

And the fourth turning, the *Crisis*, is a period of major upheaval and conflict. Often involving wars or revolutions, this is when society

has a “reckoning” and is forced to confront its issues. It leads either to collapse or transformation of current institutions, setting up the society to repeat the cycle again, starting with the High.

Following this model of crisis and rebirth, it’s easy to make sense of the societal angst we’re all feeling if, according to Strauss and Howe, we sit squarely in the fourth turning. Political division and mistrust of institutions is at an all-time high. Some say we are on the verge of a financial catastrophe or at least an economic reset.

While this model is one way to explain the process, common sense and history books teach us that no civilization is collapse-proof. Every empire that has ever existed has risen and fallen—from the Greeks to the Romans to the Ottomans to the British. The United States is no exception. American hedge fund manager and investor Ray Dalio has written extensively about the signs of a nation’s demise, which include unsustainable debt cycles, rising interest burdens, internal political conflict, external power shifts, environmental and technological shocks, and deep social divides.¹⁵

Sound familiar?

Whether you’re an economist, theologian, or historian, we can all agree that the rapid acceleration of technology is a unique destabilizing influence that other civilizations didn’t have to contend with. Which leads to my third framing question.

Will Technology Control Humanity?

From designer babies engineered through CRISPR gene editing to Neuralink giving humans a brain-computer interface, our world seems filled with plotlines ripped from science fiction. They are the new realities facing us, a future that increasingly merges man and machine. Some celebrate these wonders as the latest human advances, yet they stem from a belief that we can outdo God’s design—that if we just tinker with our bodies enough, we can perfect them.

The latest advances also raise complex ethical and philosophical questions about the essence of what it means to be human. Because those who control human data will control humanity itself, leading to a technocracy—a system of government where the true rulers are the scientific and technological power brokers and experts. Control, not autonomy, will be the hallmark of this society.

The sinister part? We run the risk of blindly cooperating with our own demise by exchanging our God-given free will for convenience or pleasure. Few people understood this possibility better than cultural critic Neil Postman. Back in the 1980s, he wrote extensively about technology's impact on our culture. When I came across his writings, I was stunned at how relevant his insights remain nearly fifty years later.

Postman famously juxtaposed some of the best of dystopian literature of the twentieth century—George Orwell's *1984* (written in the 1940s) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (written in 1931). If you haven't read the classics, he helps you quickly grasp what's at stake. Here's how he summarized it:

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books.

What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one.

Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information.

Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

Orwell feared we would become a captive culture.

Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture.

In *1984*, people are controlled by inflicting pain.

In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure.

In short,

Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us.

*Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.*¹⁶

In one simple sentence, Postman captures the essence of our era through Huxley's eyes: "people will come to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think."¹⁷ Or in the fateful words of the World Economic Forum's latest ad campaign, "You'll own nothing. And you'll be happy."¹⁸

Technology is accelerating at such an alarming rate that the compound effects on our brains and bodies will be visceral. If a future like AI scientist Ray Kurzweil describes, where "robots the size of molecules enter our brains noninvasively through our capillaries"¹⁹ and connect us to a digital cloud, could possibly be true, we will all need to be ready.

TAKE HEART

At this point, your heart might be racing as you feel a growing sense of dread. Before you google "how to build a bunker," remember that Christians are called and equipped to face difficulty with joy and courage.

On the night of his betrayal, which would lead to his death, Jesus explained some of the trials that his disciples would soon face. Then he assured them, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."²⁰ You and I *will* have trouble in this world, Jesus says, but we will also have him—our supernatural source of peace and strength, to face whatever comes our way. None of the craziness we're facing surprises, scares, or confuses God. We know how this story ends. He has overcome, and we are called to walk in faithful, steadfast obedience.

Christians must lead this conversation not from a place of fear, but from a place of hope, wisdom, and realism grounded in facts. If Christians step up, think of all the opportunities for sharing the gospel and furthering God's kingdom that will be created. Think of how we could live out our call to be a light on a hill in a world consumed by darkness and tragedy.

Since the first century, believers have dealt with an unpredictable future and, often under dire circumstances, chosen to lead lives of quiet and courageous confidence. The early church watched as their friends and leaders were tortured, imprisoned, even beheaded. Today, *millions* of believers are forced to worship in secret in countries where even possessing a Bible could result in a fine, jail time, or worse.²¹

How do Christians forge ahead amid danger and uncertainty, in a world where people around them despise their convictions? By taking a long view, building a resilient community, and—most of all—modeling patient endurance. This core quality is encouraged throughout the New Testament and is *commanded* when John writes, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”²²

Will you have what it takes to remain patient? To endure what’s next?

None of us can do this alone. It will take a countercultural group of believers committed to a better way—not just to endure our circumstances, but to flourish despite them. C. S. Lewis paints a picture of how humanity can thrive, even under the threat of collapse:

If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.²³

I’m writing this book because, yes, I see a future full of challenges. This is nothing new—every generation has faced their own challenges. But I also see a future where a faithful, resilient community of believers offers an alternative way of living to a desperate world. In many ways,

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we were made to overcome difficulty. To be a people who thrive as they eat, heal, work, play, interact, and love as God intended. Christians know the story God is telling and are equipped to live with confidence from knowing that his plan is above any scheme of man. God is looking for faithful believers who will lead through this season with patient endurance.

The question is, will we passively observe or work hard to get ready?

I've made my choice and hope to persuade you to join me.