

Gospel Life Fellowship - Faith Guide During Uncertainty and Suffering (Updated Mar. 21, 2020)

(1-page Overview)

How Shall We Live by Faith during this Pandemic?

We are witnessing events unlike anything in the last one hundred years. Just the recent few weeks have brought life-altering changes to people all over the world. In all likelihood, our daily lives patterns will be impacted for months and we will face unexpected challenges. My prayer is that you would be aware but at peace. Be aware of the developing circumstances around us and also gain peace for we are grounded in Christ our Rock. Jesus said, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

So how should we respond during these unprecedented times? Jesus, in His prayer in John 17, refers to us as people who are "not of this world, but sent into the world". For Christians, we must respond to this crisis in faith, not fear. Christ came to serve with selfless love, He altered His lifestyle and was willing to suffer, even to death. As His disciples, we follow in suit.

What do we know about the Pandemic?

We know the virus is highly contagious, possibly even when there are mild to no symptoms. Statistics indicate that Covid-19 is especially dangerous to the elderly and to those with pre-existing conditions. Availability of testing is very limited, but even so, the number of confirmed cases is rising rapidly and we are experiencing widespread community transmission (spread within, not brought in from outside). This pandemic not only threatens people's health, but also the nation's health infrastructure and economy (daily livelihood).

What is the best way for Christians today to lovingly serve our neighbor?

The main ways Christians can help slow down the spread of infection are through prayer, social distancing and good hygiene. Some call it "flattening the curve". While healthcare workers are heroically running into danger to treat the sick, the public must practice social distancing. The first group's role is to heal the sick, the latter's role is to do no harm. Simply put, Christians need to ground ourselves in faith and rise up to social responsibility.

Next Steps - Moving Online

Beginning this Sunday, we will shift all our gatherings online. Our Sunday service will have two available formats. We will have a live interactive Sunday worship via video conferencing. We encourage people to join this option if possible so that we can continue to "meet" together and do community life. There will also be a pre-recorded worship service available for people of different regions. We have already begun having Discipleship Training and Leadership meetings online. Let us be diligent in communicating with one another and caring for each other. Gatherings may have halted, but we must unite in community, thrive in discipleship, and minister in compassion.

Prayer Guide

1. Pray for Federal, State and Local Government Leaders to effectively coordinate these efforts
2. Pray for protection, faith and strength for healthcare workers and those at high-risk.
3. Pray that churches will stand in faith and live in courage to love beyond our own comforts and safety
4. Pray that all people will love and serve wisely, not unwittingly putting others in danger
5. Pray for the hope of Christ to shine brightly in the hearts of people

(For more information, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>)

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(Detailed Explanation)

In Regards to Faith

For Christians, we must respond to this crisis in faith, not fear. In light of the uncertainties of this outbreak, our certainty in Christ should produce faithfulness, love and wisdom. Our response is not panic, but resolve. Our focus is not self-preservation, but self-sacrifice. Our message is not fear-mongering, but a call to truth and sober responsibility.

Throughout history, Christians have demonstrated incredible courage and sacrifice during crisis events. During times of persecution, numerous Christians refused to renounce their faith and remained faithful to God even to death. At other times, during the outbreak of plagues, Christians remained with the sick to treat and comfort them, even at the risk of their own lives.

Today, the majority of us have a different role to fulfill. Instead of running into the fire to put out the fire, we must focus more on ensuring that we do not spread the embers and light new fires elsewhere. We must help slow down the spread of infection through social distancing and good hygiene. Some call it "flattening the curve". While healthcare workers are heroically running into danger to treat the infected, the general public must help slow down the spread of the infections. In doing so, we protect hospitals and healthcare workers from being overwhelmed and ultimately help them treat the sick. While we shouldn't be filled with fear, we should soberly recognize this as a very serious matter.

How Shall We Respond?

With Conviction of the truths on which I stand

God is in control of the beginning and end of our days. Physical death is not the end for us. Christ has secured us in Him for all eternity. A new micro-organism cannot change any of these truths.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26)

With Compassion for others

There are many people who are dying without the hope of Jesus Christ. Let's be walking demonstrations of the hope and love of Christ. Let's do our part through "flattening the curve" to preserve physical life so that people may know eternal life. And let's do all we can through social distancing to not endanger their health and safety. If given an opportunity, be ready to share the hope you have in Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15).

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 22:37-39)

With Confession of the state of our hearts

Let's tell God what worries us, what delights us and what we desire and need. May God use this time to reveal areas of our hearts that He needs to change and grow. Are there some idols in our hearts that we need to let go of? Are there irrational fears that God needs to resolve? Rev. Harry Reeder says,

"Circumstances do not dictate character, but reveal it and become the occasion to refine it."

Walk in faith, pray for the sick, serve selflessly, and do no harm. Bring peace and hope to your neighbor and may God be glorified in all you say and do.

What We Know About Covid-19

- The virus is highly contagious and is spread through respiratory droplets and direct contact
- The elderly and those with pre-existing conditions are at much higher risk of sickness and death
- Symptoms vary from mild to extreme and asymptomatic people can possibly be infectious
- There is currently no known vaccine or treatment
- In other nations, sudden surges in patients have overwhelmed hospitals and healthcare workers

Direct Health Implications on Other Individuals

- **Observation:** Symptoms vary from individual to individual, some showing mild to no symptoms. The elderly and those with pre-existing conditions are the most at risk.
- **Implication:** One person may get well with no issues, but if that person spreads the infection to someone else, this may put the latter individual at serious risk.
- **Conclusion:** We need to practice diligent hygiene and social distance not only for myself, but for the safety and health of others. At this time, people's passive response is more important.
- **Conclusion:** Our personal actions will impact others. How we appropriately apply both pro-activity and passivity will determine whether we help or hurt others.

Nationwide Health

- **Observation:** Currently in the U.S. the rate of infection spread is higher than our ability to treat/cure the infection, as there is no nationwide plan of treatment or cure.
- **Observation:** We as a nation do not have widespread and accessible testing yet. yet, even the number of confirmed infections is rising nationwide. Thus, we can assume that the virus is already spreading below the radar. The current published number of confirmed infections can only reflect what we're able to detect through limited testing. We can assume that published numbers do not accurately reflect the number of actual infected.
- **Implication:** When widespread testing more accurately reveals the actual state of the outbreak in the U.S. we can expect the number of confirmed infections to increase sharply.
- **Implication:** Effectively dealing with this virus will require a coordinated effort of the general public, the healthcare industry, private research labs, federal and local government.
- **Conclusion:** We must pray for the government, research labs and health care workers.
- **Conclusion:** We the public must do our part right now in slowing down the spread of infections.

Effect on Health Care Facilities and Workers

- **Observation:** A surge of confirmed infections has overwhelmed hospitals and healthcare workers in other nations, catching them off guard. (China, Korea, Iran, Italy)
- **Implication:** A surge of confirmed infections may overwhelm the healthcare workers and facilities and also the insurance processing system. This will affect not only those affected by Covid-19, but also those needing other medical care.
- **Implication:** A surge of confirmed infections will require longer hours from our healthcare workers and will leave them more exposed to the virus.
- **Conclusion:** We must do our best to help limit the surge of the spread of this virus. This will help the healthcare facilities and workers to more effectively treat those infected by the new virus and other patients who have existing urgent medical needs.
- **Conclusion:** We must do our best to limit the surge of the spread of this virus for the sake of our beloved brothers and sisters who work in healthcare! (doctors, nurses, administrators, hospital staff, mental health, and more)

Broader Implications

- **Observation:** As a result of a lack of customers or a government mandated shutdown, numerous businesses are closing and people are losing jobs.
- **Implication:** Prolonged loss of business and closings will create a domino effect (retail, wholesale, distributor, manufacturer...), affecting more and more people and their livelihood.
- **Conclusion:** We must do our best to limit the length of this outbreak and to limit the extent to which people are impacted financially. People may initially be able to weather a rainy day, but after a certain point, many may not be able to recover from their losses.

Far-reaching Impact of this Pandemic

- **Risk to Public Health:** Infection is most likely spreading faster than we are detecting. Symptomatic young people will be incapacitated either in hospital or home quarantine. Mild or asymptomatic patients pose as much a danger to the high-risk population.
- **Risk to Hospitals and Healthcare Workers.** they are the ones most exposed. While the general population contributes by distancing and isolating themselves, our heroic healthcare workers will be at great risk for infection and burnout.
- **Risk to People's Livelihood**
Due to the rapid rise in confirmed infections, many businesses are closing their doors. While some people are fortunate enough to be able to work from home, too many do not have this option. Countless businesses are hemorrhaging money because people aren't vacationing, dining in, gathering, spectating, or flying. More and more workers are being laid off, left without income.

Principles that serve as guides for recent decisions as well as future decisions.

- 1) We are called as a church to live for God's glory and His mission. (Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18-20)
- 2) We are called to obey government authorities inasmuch as they doesn't conflict with our obedience to God (1 Peter 2:13-17)
- 3) We may halt physical meetings, but the life and mission of church continues (Eph. 4; Heb. 10:25)
- 4) We are called to love our neighbors and be agents of hope and healing (Matt. 22:37-39)
- 5) We are called to take care of one another, especially those in special need (James 1:27)
- 6) Make decisions based on facts, acknowledging when there is lack of data. Process the torrent of online data with discernment and prayer. Dispel myths and take care to make assumptions.
- 7) Share information and collaborate to collect data and make good analyses.