

Coping with the Corona Crisis.



Since the onset of this pandemic, it seems to me that there has been a seismic shift in how we view our lives, our communities and the world at large. The outbreak of coronavirus has indeed come as a great shock to those who assumed that our technologically and medically sophisticated, 21st century civilisation would keep us safe and secure.

Coupled with the issue of climate change, we are now talking more about 'survival' than we are about 'progress'.

On the other hand, we could say that there is nothing new under the sun. Though we, in our lifetimes, may not have experienced a pandemic like this before, there have been regular occurrences of devastating diseases throughout history.

Although our times **are** different in terms of the numbers of people living on the earth and the way we (and viruses) can travel around the globe, others who lived before us have had to come to terms with their own pandemics. In this sense we are not unique.

We read, "So many people died, that cities and villages in Italy...were abandoned and fell into ruin." However, this is not about the impact of coronavirus, but a smallpox epidemic that infected the Roman Empire in 165 A.D.

And between 1347-52, the Black Death swept across Europe killing 100,000,000 (100 million) people. During the Great Plague of London in 1665-6, 75,000 people died. Spanish flu resulted in 50 million deaths worldwide in 1918.

As many have already pointed out, a global emergency like this poses two fundamental threats: firstly, a threat to our livelihoods and secondly, a threat to our lives.

In our materialistic western culture, things which threaten our jobs strike at the very heart of our security. If we have less or no money coming in, who will pay the mortgage, the rent, the food bills, the utility bills, the council tax etc.?

I was talking to two businessmen recently who were lamenting the big drop in share prices; they were worried about the value of their pensions!

The second (and even greater) existential threat to our security highlighted by this pandemic, is the threat of dying.

I once saw a huge advertisement hoarding which brought together the state of our financial health and the reality of our physical death. It was an advertisement for Life Insurance and it simply asked this question: "If you were to die today, how much would you be worth tomorrow?"

The answer of course is that, from a financial point of view, if we die today, we are worth absolutely nothing tomorrow, we own nothing, it all belongs to someone else!

Although we have to cope with the daily drip-drip of the growing numbers of people dying as a result of the coronavirus, we have also to remember that every year about 600,000 people die in the UK for one reason or another. Death is an ever-present threat to all of us in this dangerous world, though it is something we put on the back page. Coronavirus, however, brings death onto the front page.

There are 3 other things I would highlight in view of the current emergency.

1. First of all, and this may sound counter-Christian, **as a priority**, we need to take care of our own physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and practical needs during this crisis.



When there is an emergency onboard an aeroplane and the oxygen masks drop down, the advice is always to fit your own mask first before you help others with theirs. If we don't, we may not be in a position to help anyone.

This is also why we must prioritise and pray for adequate protection for NHS workers, and others we are relying on, to take care of us should we fall ill.

2. Secondly, be aware of the opportunities that will present themselves for witness/testimony and for giving practical help to others.

A few days ago, a neighbour phoned to ask if we would like a foxglove plant for our garden! But what she was really needing to do, was to talk about the current situation and get some reassurance from a Christian faith perspective.

These times of increased pressure and stress can afford more opportunities for us to speak about our faith for these main reasons: -

- Christianity offers the most satisfactory explanation for why the world is the way it is.
 - Christian values of sacrificial love and involvement with the community become an even more powerful witness.
 - Isolation can increase our levels of anxiety (often to do with not being in control and dealing with uncertainty) and make people more open to the gospel. People are less likely to be influenced by peer pressure and more likely to want to 'make up their own minds'.
3. The third thing to be aware of is that these present circumstances can evoke feelings of loss, grief and bereavement.

The loss of income, loss of freedom, loss of routine, loss of personal contact, loss of the normal roles we play etc. is significant and can leave us feeling sad. Don't be surprised by this, it is completely normal!

It is true, of course, that we all react differently to an emergency of this kind and we are all affected in different ways. Some people have had to go into 'fast forward' and are working under incredible pressure, whilst others have had to stop and take what could be a long, enforced 'sabbatical'.

Some may be feeling a sense of powerlessness and may want 'to do something to help'. Hence the massive response to the Government's request for extra help with the NHS.

We need to give each other permission to respond in different ways according to our circumstances, temperament etc.

Finally, what might be a theological/Biblical perspective on all that is happening?

Again, Christians will have different views. My own, in this case, is that what has come to steal, kill and destroy is from the devil. And, it is something that God is allowing for His own purposes.

Even things that are evil in themselves, God can bring good out of them. He does indeed work all things together for good for those who love him.

God may be allowing this crisis to occur in order to stop us in our tracks and cause us to ask some searching questions about our lives and the direction in which we are going, individually, as a society and as a network of global nations.

We may be forced to ask who and what really matters to us?

This infection is a shared challenge we all face; the virus is no respecter of persons and we may have to learn new ways of being together and supporting one another in a safer and more secure environment. This could be a positive outcome.

However, we will also have to repent of our waywardness (a change of mind leading to a change of direction) and return to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who doesn't desire the death of anyone but wants us all to experience life in all its fulness, both now and in the future.

God allows these things to happen as solemn warnings. We need to take heed and pay attention. The nations, it seems, are being shaken.

Some verses to hold on to: -

- “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Ps. 18:2)
- “When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your love, O Lord supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.” (Ps. 94: 18 &19)
- “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” (1 Thess. 5:8)

Keep communicating Pray without ceasing Love one another

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