

Coronavirus and Crisis

What a time we're going through, isn't it? With the Coronavirus, we are in the midst of something we have not seen before. What are some of the feelings people are having right now? What are some feelings that **you** are having right now?

Uncertainty: "How is this virus going to turn out? When will things get better? Will I get sick? Will I have enough groceries and toilet paper to get through the next few weeks? Or months?"

Fear: Fear is a deep and drastic level of concern. You may be saying to yourself, "I'm really afraid. The world is in chaos right now." In 1918, the world went through another pandemic - the Spanish flu. This strain of flu virus infected an estimated 500 million people - 1/3 of the world's population at the time. By estimates, at least 50 million people died, including as many as 675,000 people in the U.S. Will the Coronavirus be just a blip on the screen compared to that? As bad? Worse? We don't know. There is not yet a vaccine. There's uncertainty and it brings fear to some of us.

Anxiety: This is a level of concern less than fear, but still brings uneasiness. "What if I get sick? Are there enough test kits?" Health care professionals may be stretched thin. Hospitals? "Will there be enough room? Would they use empty school buildings to hold and treat people?" Will it affect your finances? Or someone you know well? This virus and the isolation it is producing and the closings that are happening will affect the salaries and savings of people.

Loneliness: In a few days or weeks, some people may experience loneliness as health experts and the media tell us to isolate and practice social distancing. You probably won't see as many people as you usually do. People are off from work. Students are out of school. Nursing homes are not permitting visitors. Away from friends and family more, some may get lonely. Especially older adults who may stay inside because they are more susceptible.

Calmness: Others are pretty calm – they don't see a need to panic. They say to themselves, "It will work itself out. We'll get through."

Most of us have some level of anxiety, though. We are in uncharted waters.

Because of the questions we have, **what are some things God would want us to know?** Amidst the health concerns, financial concerns, and relational concerns, what does God say to us? In the middle of our anxiety and uncertainty, we need to hear what God in His Word has to say to us. God speaks. And it's important we hear Him and filter our feelings through His promises in Scripture and the presence of His Holy Spirit with us.

I want to share about the "witness of God." W I T H N E S S - What does the 'witness' of God mean? Over and over in the Bible, Scripture verses speak of how God is **with** us. In situation after situation, when people in the Bible are confronted with crisis - any level of hardship - people are comforted, strengthened, and given renewed hope when God speaks to them of how he is "with" them.

Here are some Scripture passages the Lord wants you to know for encouragement. Let them settle deep in your heart . . .

Psalm 23:4 – “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” What comfort from the 23rd Psalm! The shepherd provides for and protects his sheep. Our Shepherd watches over us and is *with* us.

Joshua 1:5; 9 – “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you . . . Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” God promises his presence and protection to Joshua as he leads God’s people following Moses’ death and as he leads the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Isaiah 41:10 – “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” In this verse in *Isaiah 41:10*, God is encouraging His people, saying that He will care for them and be *with* them during the extreme hardship of their exile.

John 14:16-17 – “And I will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.” Jesus says the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would come alongside the disciples and bring comfort and confidence when Jesus would go and be with the Father. The Holy Spirit is with you in new seasons of life.

Matthew 28:20 – “. . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” As the disciples took the Gospel out to the world, Jesus’ Spirit would be with them in this amazing endeavor!

Revelation 21:3-4 – “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’” Deep in God’s heart is his desire to be with you. From his presence with Adam and Eve in Garden, to God and his people through the Old Testament, to Jesus with others in his ministry of compassion, to his people now and to you, and on to Revelation where God’s desire is to dwell with us for eternity in the new heavens and earth.

What can we do with this time? How can we redeem it and make it count for something instead of letting go of an opportunity to grow in Christ and give to others?

When we are uncertain, fearful, anxious, or lonely, we can use this opportunity to:

- **Spend time with God:** pray – talk and listen to God and read the Scriptures. You may have more time inside with less activities. What a time to spend more time sitting with Jesus at his feet listening, talking, and worshipping.
- **Take care of one another in the church as Christians.** We have fellow Christians here in our church who might need our help. Pray that spiritually God will help allay their fears. Call them on the phone and be a friend. Pray for them on the phone. Answer their

questions. Do their grocery shopping for them or get needed items. Several will stay inside to protect themselves. What a great way to serve others.

- **Reach out to others who may not know Christ yet.** We could do this for those who do not know Jesus. We can meet practical needs, offer prayers, and share the assurance that God is in control and sovereign over any virus or difficulty we have in life. How would this come across to them? It would show the love of Jesus and, along with the words of the Gospel we share, draw some into a personal relationship with Christ!

I think we may be coming into an amazing season for the church. We are going to have the opportunity to speak peace into peoples' hearts amidst their anxiety. We're going to have the opportunity for conversations on how God is bringing us peace and the difference a relationship with God can make in the hard times and good times of life.

God is with us. Hold onto that promise. And reach out to people with that promise and help them practically and serve them.

The Fellowship of the Ring is the first of three adventure films in the series, *The Lord of the Rings*, based on the book by J.R.R. Tolkien. It's one of my favorite movie series. In this first film, the conversation between Frodo and his friend, Sam, goes like this:

"It would be the death of you to come with me, Sam," said Frodo, "and I could not have borne that."

"Not as certain as being left behind," said Sam.

"But I am going to Mordor."

"I know that well enough, Mr. Frodo. Of course you are. And I'm coming with you."

Mordor is a hard and evil place. Uncertainty and fear abound. But he doesn't go alone. Frodo had Sam, his friend, who would not leave him on his own. We have more than a friend. We have the God of the universe who goes with us in all of life. We don't have to fear the effects of a virus. Or anything in life. For God is with you!

"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons - neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below - indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8:38-39.*

Blessings,

Jason