

(Some info updated on 3/18/2020)

March 12, 2020

Dear Grace Family,

With the increasing coronavirus cases happening around the world, many believers across the United States wonder how to respond to the increasing alarm. What would God have us do in the face of a growing international health crisis? How should we help a panicked world? Recently, the Gospel Coalition published an article on how to respond to the anxiety that many are feeling concerning the threat of the Coronavirus. We took some of the information in this article and our own perspective for you to consider as we ask God to help us to respond to the situation by grace through faith.

Remember What We Know

First, it's important to be reminded about what we already know. Worry is not our friend, and panic is not our way. Solomon reminds us, *"If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small"* (Prov. 24:10). May it never be said that God's people are governed more by fear than faith. Corrie ten Boom, along with other faithful from among the nations, led courageously in the face of the Nazi fascism—a different form of deadly virus. And she reminds us, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength." In times of crisis, the world needs steady people who are strengthened by God's grace and selfless by God's power. Worry accomplishes nothing except weakness of heart and head. It's been said that 90 percent of the things we worry or become panicked about never happen, and the other 10 percent are outside our control. While we remain on alert against viruses of doctrine or disease, worrying won't change our circumstances or lower our chance of infection. It won't help us fight off illness or move us to action. Worrying about COVID-19 (or anything else) will only increase trouble. Rather than worrying and being anxious, Jesus calls us to respond with prayer and faith in him (Matt. 6:33–34; Phil. 4:6). We need not worry ultimately because we know the One who has defeated sin and death (1 Cor. 15:55–57). Remind yourself continually: it takes the same amount of energy to worry as to pray. One leads to peace, the other to panic. We have a choice on how to respond.

Love Well and Trust Him

If God calls us to be concerned about anything, it's how to love people well. The psalmist encourages us, *"Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness"* (Ps. 37:3). Peter reminds us to press on in the midst of every evil. Whether persecutions or pandemics, we can trust in the Lord, knowing, *"It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil"* (1 Pet. 3:17). Worry is common to man. But God has called us to face troubles and threats with courage, leaning our weight on him. Throughout history, Christians have often stood out because they were willing to help the sick even during plagues, pandemics, and persecutions. They loved people and weren't afraid of death because they understood that *"to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:21). By stepping into the mess of sickness and disease, they were able to demonstrate their faith to a watching world. So, rather than just asking "How do I stay healthy?" perhaps we should be also ask "How can I help the sick?" Let's be quick to help and slow to hide in basements. Prayer-infused confidence, compassion, and selflessness should mark how we talk about the coronavirus. Why? Because our Savior put on flesh

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We are a family of missionary servants who are making disciples!

(John 1:14) and stepped into our sickness, sin, and death. He healed the sick and cared for the hurting. We must do likewise.

We Can Be Careful As Well and Use Wisdom

None of this means we should be reckless. Neither Christ's love nor God's Word encourages careless risks, but both promote obedience. Loving the sick doesn't mean we intentionally infect ourselves (Prov. 22:3).

The CDC and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services will continue to give guidelines on how to respond to stop the spread of the virus.

- Preserve social distancing of six feet between people.
- Remember to follow good hygiene practices like frequent and thorough handwashing and covering your cough or sneeze with your sleeve and use hand sanitizer.
- Be vigilant about cleaning procedures to ensure there is regularly and properly disinfecting all shared surfaces (like door handles).
- If you are sick, stay home.

We need to ask, "How can we care for those at risk?" As others get sick, care for them. Are most of you still healthy? That's a great reason to gather for thanksgiving and prayer. Seek appropriate medical care as symptoms arise and don't forsake caring for one another. Follow the example of those who've acted faithfully in the past. In 19th-century England, when thousands were dying of cholera, Charles Spurgeon visited homes to care for people. Many churches are mobilizing themselves, including the church of Jesus in Wuhan China, the virus's epicenter, to minister to those in need.

Finally, as you watch the world react to this crisis—itsself a stark reminder of our mortality and signs of His return—don't neglect to share the hope you have in Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15). Share how he rescued you from the universal epidemic of sin and the penalty of death. Share that your hope is not found in remaining healthy this side of heaven. We'll all face death eventually. Thanks to Jesus, we can come to that day with confidence. Like Paul, we can remember that to live is Christ, but to die is gain (Phil. 1:21). We truly have nothing ultimate to fear—not from the coronavirus, natural disasters, or anything else. So, we trust Jesus. Pray for the sick. Walk in God's strength. Love others well. Do good to all. Use your health to serve, not to hide. Jesus is sovereign over it all. We will remain on this earth until His work for us to do is finished (Acts 13:36).

This is a rapidly evolving situation that we will continue to monitor. If you have questions, please reach out to the Elders.

Praying for wisdom,

Grace Church Elders

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