



# Strands of Thought

FROM GREG STRAND

ARTICLE

ENGAGING CULTURE (/BLOG/ENGAGING-CULTURE)

## Christians, the Church and COVID-19

*Updates and resources regarding the recent COVID-19 outbreak*

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<https://twitter.com/efca>

We are all affected by COVID-19. And from what we are being told, this new way of life and living will be the “new normal” for the next few weeks or, more likely, months.

# All are affected

*Because of the need to engage in social distancing, we need to be intentional and purposeful in figuring out how we can “stir one another to love and good works” and to “encouraging one another.”*

🐦 TWEET ([HTTP://WWW.TWITTER.COM/INTENT/TWEET?URL=HTTPS://WWW.EFCA.ORG/BLOG/ENGAGING-CULTURE/CHRISTIANS-CH-19&TEXT=%20BECAUSE+OF+THE+NEED+TO+ENGAGE+IN+SOCIAL+DISTANCING%2C+WE+NEED+TO+BE+INTENTIONAL+AND+PURPOSEFU](http://www.twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https://www.efca.org/blog/engaging-culture/christians-ch-19&text=%20because+of+the+need+to+engage+in+social+distancing%2C+we+need+to+be+intentional+and+purposeful))

*I was affected personally.* Last week, I was in Philadelphia teaching a Theology Refresher for the **EFCA Eastern District Association** (<http://www.efca.org/ministry-contacts/eastern-district-association>). I returned on Friday evening. During my travel, I was not aware of being around anyone infected, and when I returned home I was not experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. However, I was also aware of these facts. For those who have been infected, and even when they are not aware of being infected, if that infected-unaware-person stays away from others for five days, you decrease the percentage of infecting others by 50 percent. If you wait 11 days, you decrease the percentage by 95 percent. For those of us who have been with others, even though we may not have symptoms, and even if we may not know if we have been infected, we love others by staying away from them. That is a bit counterintuitive for the Christian faith, but not in a day of a viral virus. Karen, my wife, and I did not gather with our local church family this past Sunday. I am not concerned personally, since I had no known symptoms. But I do care about others, so, out of love for and concern of others (Matt 22:37-39; John 13:34-35; Rom 12:10; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 1:22), we did not attend.

*Our churches have been affected.* From what I have heard and read, most of our EFCA churches (actually, most churches more broadly) did not meet this past Sunday, or they met in a more limited way, certainly a more circumspect

manner knowing of the responsibility as leaders to avoid situations in which the virus could spread. Many live-streamed ([//www.efca.org/blog/leading-churches/3-ways-utilize-video-during-covid-19](http://www.efca.org/blog/leading-churches/3-ways-utilize-video-during-covid-19)). All of us as pastors, elders and leaders in our churches are committed to fulfill the mandate given to the church to gather as the people of God: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25). However, during this pandemic, most of us are thinking through new, different and creative ways to uphold the mandate “not neglecting to meet together.” Additionally, because of the need to engage in social distancing, we need to be intentional and purposeful in figuring out how we can “stir one another to love and good works” and to “encouraging one another.” We are prayerfully seeking wisdom from above to live wisely here below (Jas 3:17), which will entail fulfilling this mandate through some other means and avenues. I am encouraged as I see our pastors and elders lead with conviction and kindness, with courage and compassion, with boldness and humility.

*Our national office has been affected.* One of the ways those of us serving at the EFCA national office will be affected is that most will be working remotely. In his commitment to love others, President Kompelien made a decision beginning today that results in most staff who serve in the EFCA national office will work remotely, with only limited staff continuing to work at the office. There is no work-related travel, and for those necessary meetings, virtual options are to be considered. We will continue to serve, along with our districts, our pastors, leaders and churches, though it will be done significantly differently. Just as local churches are thinking through faithful ministry in this day, so are we. Together, by God’s grace, for God’s glory, and the well-being of his people, we will, in dependent prayer, discern the will and way of the Lord for this specific moment.

This is how we are being affected. As we all know, this also expands to our nation and other countries around the world.

## Terminology

Most of us are hearing and learning the meaning of new terms that have not been commonplace in our vocabulary. However, these terms are known in places where viruses like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS, 2003), the Swine Flu (H1N1 Pandemic, 2009) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS, 2012) have occurred.

Here is a list of a few of these **terms**

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-social-distancing-and-self-quarantine>).

- ***Social distancing***: “Cancelling events that are likely to draw crowds is an example of social distancing. Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. Staying at least six feet away from other people lessens your chances of catching COVID-19.”
- ***Isolation***: “For people who are confirmed to have COVID-19, isolation is appropriate. Isolation is a health care term that means keeping people who are infected with a contagious illness away from those who are not infected. Isolation can take place at home or at a hospital or care facility.”
- ***Self-quarantine***: “People who have been exposed to the new coronavirus and who are at risk for coming down with COVID-19 might practice self-quarantine. Health experts recommend that self-quarantine lasts 14 days. Two weeks provides enough time for them to know whether or not they will become ill and be contagious to other people.”

- **Flattening the curve:** “Flattening the curve refers to using protective practices to slow the rate of COVID-19 infection so hospitals have room, supplies and doctors for all of the patients who need care.” (You can read more about this [here](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/corona-simulator/) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/corona-simulator/>).

All of these terms describe a new way of life for most of us. There is no parallel to this way of responding to a virus for the vast majority living here. What we are learning is that following these measures—that is, implementing these factors into our lives—is critical to stem the spread of COVID-19. For those unfamiliar with the need to respond in such strong ways, it can sound as if we are responding in fear, or the required response is way overstated or too much.

However, the response given by Francis Collins, the director of the National Institutes of Health, who is not given to overstatement or exaggeration, is appropriate to the moment. He says we're on an "**exponential curve**" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/interview-francis-collins-nih/608221/>):

"There are estimates that if nothing goes right and if we fail to flatten the curve and if health systems are overwhelmed, we might see the deaths of as many as a million and a half people in the United States...Now we have a chance to change that, by applying now the most draconian measures on social distancing to try to limit the spread of coronavirus from person to person. But we will not succeed at changing the course from that exponential curve unless there is full national engagement in those commitments to try to reduce spread." (*The Atlantic*

(<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/interview-francis-collins-nih/608221/>)

## Resources

Many have and are writing on COVID-19, as we are all on a learning curve. There are numerous articles that have been helpful and each for different yet important reasons. I include those that have been helpful to me, and as I read them, I concluded they would likely also be helpful to you. Things change daily, so some articles date quickly. I include a select number of articles and sites below with brief annotations to help you know the content of the article or site. They are simply listed, not in an order of importance.

Most of what you read below in the first category is informational and educational. Most of what you will read in the second category relates to us as Christians and churches including guidance and guidelines for life and ministry during these days of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the things you will note is that ministries are partnering for the benefit of the whole. This is a good thing.

Another aspect to note is that the local church is where all of this is practically lived out. It is where the truth we affirm in the public health arena and in the science behind this virus, and the biblical truth we affirm and live out as the people of God find expression. This is where the details will have to be worked out. The materials below provide guidance for you as you ponder the practical outworking of ministry in the local church, but they do not do that specific and detailed work necessary for the local church. It is greatly encouraging to read the practical and pastoral theology lived out in our EFCA churches, and it is evident it is grounded in the Scriptures and theology.

## Public Health: Common Grace

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "**Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary.html>)": This report consists of a "situation summary." It will also be helpful to check this site as they "will provide updated information as it becomes available, in addition to updated guidance."
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "**Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>)": This provides "interim guidance for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)," most specifically to those meetings that consist of "large events and mass gatherings."
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "**Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)** ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSQztKXR6k0&utm\\_source=feedblitz&utm\\_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm\\_campaign=FeedBlitzEmail](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSQztKXR6k0&utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_campaign=FeedBlitzEmail))": This six-minute video explains how the coronavirus spreads, why "social distancing" is important and at the end of the day, "why fighting the

coronavirus depends on you,” on each one of us. It is very helpful.

- **"The President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America: 15 Days to Slow the Spread ([https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20\\_coronavirus-guidance\\_8.5x11\\_315PM.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/03.16.20_coronavirus-guidance_8.5x11_315PM.pdf))"**: These guidelines outline steps for the next couple of weeks, with a call to be vigilant and to commit to “15 days to slow the spread” of the coronavirus.
- **Asaf Bitton, "Social Distancing: This Is Not A Snow Day (<https://medium.com/@ariadnelabs/social-distancing-this-is-not-a-snow-day-ac21d7fa78b4>)"**: This not only helps us to understand “social distancing,” but it also informs us of why it is so important to stop the spread of the coronavirus. “Social distancing” is one of the key ways to “flatten the curve,” so that our medical infrastructure is not overrun, and those who need the critical care receive it.

## The Church: Special Grace

- **Daniel Harrell, Matthew Branaugh and Kyle Rohane, "Concise Coronavirus Guide for Churches ([https://subscribe.christianitytoday.com/pubs/L2/TDY/corona-virus-page.jsp?null=249078&cds\\_mag\\_code=TDY&id=1583785924170&lsid=306915320410landing-page&utm\\_source=cltupdate&utm\\_medium=Newsletter&utm\\_term=27603](https://subscribe.christianitytoday.com/pubs/L2/TDY/corona-virus-page.jsp?null=249078&cds_mag_code=TDY&id=1583785924170&lsid=306915320410landing-page&utm_source=cltupdate&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=27603))"**  
This resource is compiled by *Christianity Today* and consists of “information and resources to help us live out our calling during crisis.” While brief, it provides wise counsel grounded in biblical truth and pastoral sensitivity. (Here is another link to resources: **"Coronavirus and the Church: CT's**



## Latest News and Advice

(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/march-web-only/coronavirus-churches-christians-news-advice-covid-19.html>).")

- **Jamie Aten and Kent Annan (Humanitarian Disaster Institute), "Preparing Your Church for Coronavirus (COVID-19): A Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and Faith-Based Planning Manual and Faith-Based Planning Manual (<https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf>)"**: Grounded in God's truth and bathed in prayer, this guide is intended to "help churches in the United States plan and prepare for COVID-19." This "guide draws on biblical wisdom and our team's research. We will share insights and best practices from our collaborative work with local, state, and federal public health agencies."
- **"Coronavirus and the Church: Trusted Resources for Churches from Leading Experts (<https://coronavirusandthechurch.com/>)"**: This ministry partnership between the PEACE Plan (Rick Warren and Purpose Driven Church), the Billy Graham Center (Ed Stetzer) and the Humanitarian Disaster Institute (Wheaton College) came together to address the coronavirus epidemic. The express purpose of this ministry partnership "is to assist churches and ministry leaders as they prepare for and respond to the effects of the Coronavirus in their congregations and communities." They have included numerous resources on this site.
- **COVID-19 Church Online Summit (<https://www.covid19churchsummit.com/>)**: This two-day digital summit scheduled for March 26-27 is "for churches and church leaders responding to COVID-19" and is a shared ministry between the Humanitarian Disaster Institute (Wheaton College) and the National Association of Evangelicals

(NAE). Their intent is to enable us “to continue thinking strategically and collectively about how we can serve our congregations and communities, and they remind us to “faithfully respond. Don’t fearfully react.”

- Daniel P. Chin, "**Should Your Church Stop Meeting to Slow COVID-19? How 3 Seattle Churches Decided** (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/march-web-only/seattle-churches-stop-meeting-to-slow-covid-19-coronavirus.html>)": This includes wise and helpful guidelines from “a global health expert” who “offers tools for your congregation to respond now.” He provides guidance for how we think about gatherings, and he includes some thoughts about how to process these matters, aware of the public health concerns, from a Christian perspective. During the SARS outbreak in China in 2003, Mark, my brother, consulted with Chin in SARS control work.
- Miguel Núñez, "**The FAQs: Coronavirus Explained By An Infectious Disease Expert And Pastor** (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-we-know-coronavirus/>)": This is helpful as it combines the insights of an “infectious disease expert” who became a pastor.

## **The Church: A Few To Ponder**

- Andy Crouch, "**Love In the Time of Coronavirus: A Guide for Christian Leaders** (<https://journal.praxislabs.org/love-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-26aeb0396e3>)": This has some thoughtful and challenging words about how to process life and ministry in the midst of coronavirus, and how as leaders we need to be intentional about using these days, which have not surprised God, as an opportunity for the gospel to form and shape, or more importantly, reshape us and our culture. These are days not many have previously experienced. They are also unique opportunities to

proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Al Mohler, "**The Humbling of Civilization: Praying for the Mercy of God** (<https://albertmohler.com/2020/03/16/the-humbling-of-civilization-praying-for-the-mercy-of-god>)": This reminds us we are not invincible. It reminds us “we are witnessing . . . the humbling of a civilization that believed itself to be in control of the world—impervious to this kind of threat.” This provides (forces) us to “translate some of the proximate questions into ultimate questions.” This reminds us we live in a sinful and fallen world, and we await the Lord’s return before the groaning ceases. We give thanks for God’s common grace that birthed modern medicine and enables some to discover vaccines to battle the physical effects of sin. We also give thanks our true and abiding hope found in Jesus Christ.
- Bruno Maçães, "**Conceit and Contagion: How the Virus Shocked Europe** (<https://quillette.com/2020/03/14/conceit-and-contagion-how-the-virus-shocked-europe/>)": This is an important and challenging read in that it says much the same as Mohler, though not from a Christian perspective. The director of a hospital in Madrid, which has been overcome by coronavirus, confessed in an interview, “we have sinned from too much confidence.” In their enlightened and progressive state, unlike China, they concluded they were beyond such viruses. They were impenetrable, or so they thought. There was a sense of exceptionalism and ethnic arrogance. As part of the goal of responding to this pandemic is to “flatten the curve,” this pandemic also graphically fleshes out the truth that sin and its effects flattens us all. For Christians, that sin has been covered both now and in and for eternity.

There is also much we can learn from history and how the church responded in and through previous plagues and diseases. This will be addressed in another post.

*Might the gospel spread and the church of Jesus Christ shine these days, and may our influence be spiritually viral during these days of the coronavirus pandemic.*

🐦 TWEET ([HTTP://WWW.TWITTER.COM/INTENT/TWEET?URL=HTTPS://WWW.EFCA.ORG/BLOG/ENGAGING-CULTURE/CHRISTIANS-CH-19&TEXT=%20MIGHT+THE+GOSPEL+SPREAD+AND+THE+CHURCH+OF+JESUS+CHRIST+SHINE+THESE+DAYS%2C+AND+MAY+OUR+INFLUE](http://www.twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https://www.efca.org/blog/engaging-culture/christians-ch-19&text=%20might%20the%20gospel%20spread%20and%20the%20church%20of%20jesus%20christ%20shine%20these%20days%20and%20may%20our%20influe))

## Prayer

Living now with a real virus that has reached pandemic proportions, it has become viral. Although we have used this term to describe the spread of the gospel, we now have a context to understand what it means when we pray to the Lord that he would grant the gospel to grow, to become viral. Or as Michael Green would say, Christians “went everywhere gossiping the gospel” (*Evangelism in the Early Church*). In today’s language, we proclaim and live out, we transmit, the gospel with the hope and prayer it will become viral. Might the gospel spread and the church of Jesus Christ shine these days, and may our influence be spiritually viral during these days of the coronavirus pandemic. In the midst of this new and different day, Jesus Christ remains the same “yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8), and the gospel brings hope and gives life both now and for eternity.

May the Lord give us wisdom from above as we seek to live faithfully here below (Jas 3:17).

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EFCA

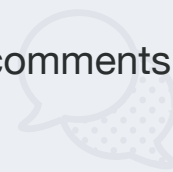
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