

# A Christian Response To The Coronavirus Pandemic Series

Contributed by Richard Tow on Mar 14, 2020

**Scripture:** Psalms 91, Luke 4:12, Psalms 27, Isaiah 26:3-4, 2 Chronicles 7:13-15, Philippians 4:6-7, Amos 4:6-12, Psalms 20:7, 2 Timothy 1:7

**Denomination:** Charismatic

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**Summary:** This message provides three simple responses for the Christian to follow during the coronavirus pandemic. Pastor Tow recommends a balanced approach of prudence and faith. We are given ample instruction in Scripture for dealing with any crisis.

## INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus now dominates the news. It has now been classified as a pandemic. Extreme actions are being taken by governments to contain the spread of this disease. It is driving the stock market down. Unfortunately, it is part of the political dialogue. It is affecting commerce, travel, entertainment, and sports. You know that it is serious when Americans will close sports events. Friday, President Trump declared this crisis a national emergency.

The primary concern is not the current sickness and death count; it is the potential devastation this disease could cause. The influenza pandemic that struck in 1918 affected one-third of the world's population. That would be 2 ½ billion people in today's population. It is estimated to have killed 50 million people when the population was much less than it is today.<sup>i</sup> Some estimates are as high as 100 million.<sup>ii</sup> To put that in perspective, the total fatalities in World War II are estimated at 70-85 million.<sup>iii</sup> One source said, "This flu killed more people in 24 weeks than the HIV/Aids killed in 24 years."<sup>iv</sup> These statistics explain why governmental responses to the current pandemic are so dramatic.

The Bible has a lot to say about plagues, and we can draw counsel from the word of God as to how we should respond to the current situation. As Christians, what should we personally do about the current crisis?

## I. EXERCISE PRUDENCE AND COMMON SENSE

When Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the temple, Jesus countered the suggestion by quoting Deut. 6:16. Jesus said, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Luke 4:12).<sup>v</sup> To force God's hand by doing something so foolish is to tempt or test God. G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "The moment we do something to prove God, we are proving that we are not sure of God. Trust never employs tricks to find out whether the one trusted is trustworthy."<sup>vi</sup> It is one thing to take a bold step of faith in obedience to God; it is another to initiate the same action for our own purposes as Satan suggested.

When Israel came to Kadesh-Barnea in Numbers 13 God had given them the land (Num. 13:2) and they were told to possess it. When the twelve spies came back from searching out Canaan, Caleb and Joshua insisted that they obey God and boldly enter into Canaan. Doing that would have been an act of faith because God had told them to do it and had promised to be with them. It was an act of unbelief

when the nation decided to not trust God and not do what He had told them to do. But the same action became presumption, not faith, when God said they would not enter the Promise Land (Num. 14:22-30), and they tried to do so on their own initiative. That was disastrous (Num. 14:39-45).

In John 8 the Jews picked up stones to throw at Jesus to kill Him. Jesus's response was interesting. He could have worked a miracle. He could have paralyzed those people. He could have struck them down dead. What did He do? He hid Himself. He slipped through the crowd and got away. John 8:59 says, "Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." We see something similar in Paul's life when the authorities were trying to arrest him. He did something very practical. In a conversation about humility, Paul told the story including how he escaped. In 2 Corinthians 11:33 he said, "but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands." Surely God could have done something more impressive. No, in this case Paul was to use the practical means available to him.

My point is this: in the absent of a divine command to do otherwise, we simply act with prudence. We do not act in presumption. Presumption is driven by subtle pride. Faith acts in humble obedience.

What are some practical things we can do in the face of the current pandemic? Doctors and governmental authorities are providing some guidance. (1) We should be more diligent than usual about washing our hands, wiping them off with sanitizers, and avoid touching our face after touching public facilities. (2) We should minimize exposure to large crowds when practical.

We may have to cut back on our entertainment activities. We may have to limit unnecessary travel. We carry on our lives, but we simply use common sense. (3) The medical profession is recommending we keep about 3 foot distance from others in public when possible. (4) We may eat at home more instead of going out to restaurants so much. (5) If we get flu-like symptoms we may consult our doctor quicker than we normally would. (6) We may store a few more supplies in case there are shortages as a result of all this. These are a few practical suggestions we can and should follow.

Two extremes should be avoided. One is the presumption that because we're a King's Kid that

we would not have to deal with any of this. Belonging to God does not exempt us from the human experience. God will take care of us as we trust and obey Him. But we are still in mortal bodies. Our complete salvation has not yet arrived. We are looking forward to being clothed with a glorified body. In the meantime, we do some groaning along with the rest of creation (Rom. 8:23). The other extreme is panic. God has not given us the spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7).

Listen to David's confidence in Ps 27:1-5:

"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. 3 Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. 4 One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. 5 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (KJV).

If you feel yourself becoming anxious, go to passages like this and let the Holy Spirit bring assurance and comfort to your heart. The fruit of the Spirit is not fear, but faith and peace.

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. 4 Trust in the Lord forever, For in Yah, the Lord, is everlasting strength (Isa. 26:3-4). We do not have to react to problems the same way the world reacts. God is with us. If we will look to Him as our source and protection, we will be fine.

II. SEEK THE LORD.

Every crisis is a call to seek God! Sometimes events happen as a wake-up call. Israel was God's chosen people. But at times in their history they would become very slack in their service to Him. They would presume upon His goodness—sometimes even delving into idolatry. Rather than immediately wiping them out for their disobedience, God would send enough trouble to get their attention. Before Jerusalem was captured by Babylon in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-17) there were other attacks that should have served as warnings. Eleven years earlier Jerusalem was attacked and King Jehoiachin was taken captive (2 Kings 24:10-12). Eight years prior to that Babylon attacked and took away captives. Daniel was a part of that captivity (Dan. 1:2-6). In between those events was opportunity to repent. God gave enough of a crisis to get their attention, then gave opportunity to seek Him and get things right. Israel failed to seize those opportunities. These things were written for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11).

My greatest concern for America is that we would respond to the current crisis with all our resources but fail to seek the Lord. It is one thing to have confidence trusting in the Lord. It is another to pridefully think we can handle the matter because of our great scientific advancements and experience. It was comforting to hear President Trump declare today as a National Day of Prayer. We should be praying today for God's wisdom and protection. We should look to the Lord for victory and not assume that we can handle it without Him.

Prior to 1918 the world was boasting about its scientific achievements, especially in the field of medicine. "For over a century, the booming science of medicine had gone from one triumph to another. Researchers had developed vaccines for many diseases: smallpox, anthrax, rabies, diphtheria, meningitis."<sup>vii</sup> The advances in microbiology had led "to the thought of invincibility."<sup>viii</sup> It was in that context that the world was hit with something they were ill-equipped

to handle. It was near that time when people were boasting they had built a ship that could not sink. That ship was the Titanic and you know the rest of the story. "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). That principle holds true for nations, just like it does for individuals.

You have heard me speak often of the promise God gave in 2 Chronicles 7:14. We get a better sense of the context for that verse when we read the verse that precedes it.

"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place" (2 Chron. 7:13-15).

The passage begins with a situation in which trouble has come. In fact, the word translated pestilence in verse 13 could be translated plague.<sup>ix</sup> What is the response God is looking for?

(1) It begins with humbling ourselves. It may sound courageous to stand up to a crisis and say, "We can defeat this!" If we do that with the same mindset Caleb had at Kadesh-Barnea, it's a good thing. Caleb added to his boast, "the Lord is with us" (Num. 14:8). He preceded it by saying, "If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us. . . ."

Whether it is explicitly stated or not, that must be our mentality. The influenza of 1918 struck a severe blow to the pride that had developed through scientific discoveries which had been made.

In a crisis, we should be humbling ourselves, not boasting in our self-sufficiency. A pandemic should remind us of our mortality and our need for God.

(2) We must pray.

Phil 4:6-7 instructs us to: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

There we're give the promise of peace if we will do what? pray with thanksgiving; let our requests be made known to God; speak to God out of our dependence upon Him. When the church forsakes her calling to be a House of Prayer, God sends something to turn her back to that. The early church is an example for us. When trouble came, they prayed.x Daniel also exemplifies this. When trouble came, he prayed. He got his friends to pray with him. As he prayed God worked in his behalf.xi I hope we do more than put on masks and wash our hands; I hope we seek the Lord for His solutions. We need His wisdom, His guidance, and His power to work in our behalf. He can turn this for the furtherance of the gospel.

(3) We must seek His face.

We must seek right relationship with God. It's not just that we tell Him what we want. We also submit ourselves to Him and pursue His will.

In 2016 we were facing an assault against our religious liberties. On the front lines were large Christian organizations like Focus on the Family and Hobby Lobby. But most of us realized it would get down to us if something didn't happen. With a sense of urgency, we prayed. Franklin Graham led prayer meetings at each state capital. God heard our prayers and gave us a reprieve from that oppression. I believe it was a reprieve—an opportunity for the church to start praying instead of entertaining. I believe the future depends far more on what the church does than what the politicians do. Jesus is walking among the candlesticks as He did in Revelation 2-3, assessing the condition of the church and pronouncing judgement based on what the church does. What will

happen in November? Will we get further reprieve, or will we get what we deserve? If a remnant will pray and seek God, He will hear and heal our land. Did you notice that phrase in 2 Chronicles 7:14? In answer to prayer he "will forgive their sin and heal their land." He can heal the land of unjust judges. He can heal the land of unjust laws. He can heal the land of economic chaos. And He can heal the land of viruses!

The danger is that we would look at the coronavirus with purely humanistic eyes. Certainly, compassion for those suffering from the disease should be included in our response. But we must not think in purely humanistic terms; we must not leave God out of the picture. Perhaps God has brought us to the kingdom for such a time as this. Perhaps this world-wide wake-up call is the opportunity of a lifetime. Oh, that multitudes would turn to Him and find, not only temporal help, but eternal salvation. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). May we be empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring healing and salvation to others (Acts 4:31)

(4) The last condition in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is that we would turn from our wicked ways. Your wicked ways may not be the same as mine. But they are all a departure from the commandments of God.

When God struck Egypt with plagues, He was not just dealing with people. He was also striking their gods. It demonstrated the weakness of their idols. God's judgment devastated Egypt's economy. As I watch the current impact of the coronavirus, I am amazed at the impact it is having on economies. How much of the world's commerce is driven by greed? How much confidence are people placing in their retirement accounts and savings? What will they do if the bottom falls out from under all that? Will they trust the Lord, or will they jump out of a 20-story

window? Sometimes God shakes things to bring us back to the basics. That happened at the end of the roaring 20's during the depression. At times God says to us: "We can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way." He always wants us to do it the easy way.

In Amos God pleads with His people. In chapter 4 He rehearses the chastening He sent, all designed to bring them to their senses. Yet they did not repent. Listen to what God said to them.

"Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord. 7 "I also withheld rain from you, When there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, And where it did not rain the part withered. 8 So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, But they were not satisfied; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord. 9 "I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, Your vineyards, Your fig trees, And your olive trees, The locust devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord. 10 "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; Your young men I killed with a sword, Along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me, "Says the Lord. 11 "I overthrew some of you, As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord. 12 "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you , Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:6-12).

He worked to bring them in right relationship with their creator. Can you hear the sadness in God's heart as He repeats the words, "Yet you have not returned to Me"? Someone might say,



“God wouldn’t do all that, He’s a good God.” Oh, but He does all that because He is a good God.

It is all designed to bring them in right relationship with Him—and nothing is right if that is not right. Their eternal relationship with Him is far more important than their temporal comfort.

Nothing could be more sobering than the words: “Prepare to meet your God.”

### III. WE SHOULD TRUST THE LORD.

When we are walking in the light, we are surrounded by God’s protection. And He is able to work all things together for our good. He is able to redeem any situation and turn it toward His purposes.

It was a terrible thing that Joseph’s brothers did to him. The intention behind their actions was evil. The suffering that Joseph experienced was real. But God redeemed even that and worked his purposes of salvation. In the end Joseph could say to his brothers, “you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.” Then Joseph added, “in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20). God is always seeking to save that which is lost. We trust God for the protection of ourselves and our loved ones, but we also pray for God’s mercy on the lost. He is not willing that any of them perish.

If a crisis causes people to turn to God and receive eternal life, something very good has come out of it. We seek the Lord for His mercy, protection, and healing. At the same time, we know the most important issue for everyone is where that individual will spend eternity. I was encouraged to read how the Christians in Wuhan China were going out on the streets proclaiming Christ when everyone else was hunkering in and afraid to go out. They are an example for us. I’ve been praying for a great harvest of souls there. Very often it is in times of trouble that people become more open to hear about God. When those opportunities come, we will, by the grace of God, set aside our own self-preservation and proclaim the gospel to the lost.

When we are in the center of God’s will, there is nothing to fear. If you drink any deadly thing it will not harm you (Mark 16:18). That promise is given in the context of proclaiming the gospel. Paul was on a mission from God when he was bitten by a deadly viper. He shook it off in the fire and was not harmed by it (Acts 28:3-5). That supernatural event got the attention of the pagans on that island.

Listen to the assurance we are given in Psalm 91:3-12.

"Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler And from the perilous pestilence. 4 He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. 5 You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, 6 Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. 8 Only with your eyes shall you look,

And see the reward of the wicked. 9 Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, 10 No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; 11 For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways."

He is able to shield us if we will look to Him for that protection. God used the first three plagues in Egypt to do a work in His people as well as judge Egypt. But when that work was done, He made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians (Ex. 8:22). He protected His people from the destruction. For the Egyptians those plagues meant destruction. For God's people they resulted in their redemption. The key factor in the last plague was the blood on the doorposts—a type of the blood of Christ applied to the believer's heart. When God saw the blood, He passed over His people as a protection, and they were not harmed. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7).

Make sure the blood of Christ has been applied to your heart. Make sure you have surrendered your life to Him. Make sure you're walking in the light. Then trust Him to watch over you and even empower you by His Spirit to minister peace and healing to others.

PRAY

Notes:

i Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 Virus). Accessed 3/12/20 at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.

ii Jeffery K. Taubenberger and David M. Morens, "1918 Influenza: the Mother of All Pandemics," *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 12(1), 15-22. Accessed 3/12/20 at <https://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid1201.050979>.

iii Wikipedia, "World War II Casualties." Accessed 3/12/20 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_casualties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties)

iv Wikipedia: Spanish Flu. Accessed 3/12/20 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_flu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu).

v All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

vi G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1931 (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1992) 61.

vii PBS: American Experience, "Influenza 1918 Program Transcript." Accessed 3/12/20 at [https://www.wtc.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/media/pdf/transcript/influenza\\_transcript.pdf](https://www.wtc.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/media/pdf/transcript/influenza_transcript.pdf).

viii Ibid.

ix OT:1698> deber (deh'-ber); from OT:1696 (in the sense of destroying); a pestilence: KJV - murrain, pestilence, plague. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.

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x Notice in Acts 4:29-30 they don't just ask for personal protection, although it is right to do that. They ask for divine empowerment to deal with the crisis proactively. God answered that prayer with a fresh outpouring of His Spirit (Acts 4:31).

xi Daniel 9 provides a model on how to pray for God's intervention. Daniel 10 reveals some of the spiritual dynamics that go on behind the scenes in response to our prayers.