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# GRACE NEWS

## COVID-19 UPDATE

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48-hours ago I did not expect to be using a portion of “sermon prep day” to write this update for our church family. But, as you all are well aware, the last two days have included an avalanche of news related to COVID-19. To some, the current situation reeks of a giant hoax or political propaganda. For others, the moment is urgent. For many, deep anxieties are provoked. Your pastors want to encourage us all to make a fresh turn to Christ and to exercise practical precautions.

### GOD’S WORD

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The Word of God is always our sure foundation and sufficient to guide us in every circumstance. Just yesterday, my devotions included Exodus 15:26 — “And He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.” I am not suggesting we should over-spiritualize the application of Scripture, or carelessly presume that all believers will be immune to the current coronavirus. Rather, I am encouraging us all to trust the same God Who exercised His sovereignty in rescuing Israel and is still sovereign over every molecule in the universe today. *Nothing* is outside of the control of our great God (cf. Psalm 135:6; Amos 3:6; Isaiah 46:10; Acts 2:22-24). Our sovereign God even uses “pestilence” to accomplish His eternal purposes (cf. Rev. 2:23; 6:8; 18:8).

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**The cross of Christ demands that we reckon with the truth that God is in total control of all things and is always working His good plan even in midst of the greatest difficulties.**

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The following passages will help us set our hearts on the LORD in the midst of these uncertain times:

- Psalm 46 (read it and worship!)
- Psalm 29:10
- Psalm 56:3
- Psalm 94:19
- Isaiah 41:10
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Revelation 19-22
- Romans 8
- Isaiah 60
- Read through one of the Gospels

## PRAYER

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Let us make it our business to pray for all affected by this virus and for the medical professionals and government officials who are seeking to care for the general public. And let's pray for this virus to be quelled as soon as possible. Let's also pray for opportunities to spread the gospel more rampantly than any virus spreads!

## EVANGELISM

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In addition to our own dependence on the Lord, this situation will afford ample opportunities to share the gospel with others. Let's take every opportunity to commend Jesus. As our neighbors have a heightened awareness of the fragility of life, point them to the Savior who alone provides eternal life.

## ACTS 4:27-31

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“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

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Part of me can't help but wonder what Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (M.D.) might say to his church today. And I'm deeply thankful that we have access to insights and wise guidance from people like Dr. Miguel Nunez, who is a pastor and infectious disease specialist.<sup>1</sup>

We ought not succumb to gullibility rooted in a media agenda, nor should we ignore practical wisdom that could help to quell a potential pandemic. We encourage you to heed the simple practical wisdom from Daniel Chin, a global health expert, about what all of us *ought* to do to play our part in quelling the spread of this virus. “We know it is possible to protect ourselves and others from being infected. However, the approaches are so ordinary that we underestimate how effective they can be:<sup>2</sup>

- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your face
- Be friendly but don't shake hands
- Keep away from sick people
- Stay home when you are sick”<sup>3</sup>

## NEIGHBOR LOVE

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As many professional reports are indicating, the concern is *not* mainly whether *you* can avoid or overcome COVID-19. Rather, the issue is largely whether *your neighbor* can. A massive portion of our population is at great risk if this virus is not curbed. Additionally, our medical professionals and facilities are in danger of being overrun with cases that will limit their care for other needs. Put simply, this season is about God's 2nd greatest commandment (Matt 22:39).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-we-know-coronavirus/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/march-web-only/seattle-churches-stop-meeting-to-slow-covid-19-coronavirus.html>

<sup>3</sup> Similar guidance and helpful awareness is available at the CDC's website: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fprevention-treatment.html)

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# CORPORATE WORSHIP AND BODY LIFE

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## WILL GRACE CHURCH GATHER FOR WORSHIP?

No. None of Grace Church's formal gatherings will resume until further notice (This applies to Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Grace Groups). This is a very tough decision for your elders and one that brings great sadness to our hearts. Even so, we believe this is the wisest path forward for many reasons, including at least the following:

- First, MAM has closed all its facilities. Following the Shelby County School closings through 3/30 all Memphis Athletic Ministries facilities are officially closed.
- Second, our church tends to have a season every year with abundant sicknesses. We are currently in the midst of such a season (Just take a look at the last month's Realm posts and pray for all who have been sick). We don't suspect that any of our recent sicknesses are related to the coronavirus, and we also don't want to unintentionally expose anyone to it, especially those whose immune system may be weakened.

## HOW SHOULD WE USE THIS SEASON?

Your pastors are exhorting the congregation to receive this unique season as a prompt from the Lord to seek His face, practice the graces of personal communion with Him in Word and prayer, and to rest in Christ. Should this season endure beyond March, we will reevaluate. Until then, we urge you to seek the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-4:6), and rest in His all-sufficient grace (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10). We plan to resume our series through 2 Corinthians when the congregation reconvenes for assembled worship.

## LET SOMEONE KNOW IF YOU NEED CARE OR ANY PRACTICAL HELP

If you are in need of *any* physical or spiritual care, or help with food or supplies, please let an elder, deacon/ness, or your Grace Group leader know.

## UNITY AND CHARITY

There are endless opinions and viewpoints about the virus and the precautions being taken around the world. Healthy dialogue and conversation can be good. Continue to be gracious to those who disagree (cf. Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6). Excel in loving and serving one another in the days ahead. We are carefully monitoring this situation and are committed to doing everything we can to provide a safe environment for our church family and surrounding community.

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## AN ILLUSTRATION OF TRUE REVIVAL

Imagine that the terror of God's holiness in light of our law-breaking, the balm of the justifying power of the gospel, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit were as present on the consciences of our fellow-men as is the news about this virus. This is a small picture of what it would be like to live in days of true revival. Pray for such an outpouring of God's Spirit in our day! Psalm 85:6!