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## What Christians Can Learn from This Coronavirus

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 had become a pandemic. This was followed by a massive drop in the U.S. stock market—resulting in a “bear market,” unthinkable a month ago. Universities sent students home to learn electronically. Air flights were canceled to Europe, following previous cancellations to places like China, South Korea, and Japan. Italy closed down. Even sports events were canceled or played without crowds. The map showed a sea of red throughout much of the world.

In 1918, the Spanish Flu became a pandemic. Fifty million people died, which at that time was five percent of the entire world population. It is human nature, even for Christians, to quickly add, “Yeah, but medical advances and communication technology are so much better today.” Yet, this invisible “bug” has caught the attention of people worldwide.

Since God is known for having high interest in teaching people, what do you think He is helping us learn during this mess? What should believers take away from this pandemic? I don’t pretend to be a spokesperson for our Creator, but based on what we know from Scripture and learn about Christian movements, there are some speculations worth considering.

### Lessons from COVID-19

#### Lesson #1:

It’s human nature to subtly drift toward the notion that we are in control and invincible. Even for Christians, it is a discipline to avoid a schizophrenic worldview that says, “Yeah, God is in control — at least in theory — but I am pretty good at taking care of

Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries a nonprofit ministry to help congregations become more effective in reaching people for Jesus Christ. His most recent book is *Restoring Civility: Lessons from the Master*.

[www.churchdoctor.org](http://www.churchdoctor.org)  
E-mail Kent: [kenthunter@churchdoctor.org](mailto:kenthunter@churchdoctor.org)



my life.” Well, even for Christians, this is a wake-up call. Or, we might call it an “event of re-clarification.”

### **Lesson #2:**

For unbelievers or wandering “fringe Christians,” there could be a temptation to blame God. “If He’s in charge, why would He let this happen? He knows everything, so surely He gets it. We have had this cruise planned for months.”

It’s a good reminder that you can’t make God the “fall guy” when bad things happen to “good” people. Disease is a consequence of the fall, the rejection of God. The “fall guys” are people who made, and continue to make, the decision that they do not need God. It is a world faced with the reality of sin. Before that, it was the Garden of Eden, a perfect world. If you want someone to blame, look, with me, into the mirror.

### **Lesson #3:**

For Christians, fellowship is a big deal. In worship, in most churches, people greet one another. In the Middle Eastern culture of the New Testament, it was a “holy kiss”—on both cheeks — a cultural connection still practiced in many countries today. In the West, it is perhaps the holy handshake or the holy hug.

Touch is an important element of faith. Look sometime at the centerpiece of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. When Jesus met some lepers, the disciples were likely freaked out twice: (1) He healed them. (2) He actually touched them!

In churches, the time of greeting can become, for many, a routine, thoughtless exercise. It is often rushed by pastors or worship leaders who have the agenda to preach long sermons and end the service in 60 minutes.

The coronavirus has robbed worshippers of the holy touch. Maybe you are willing to bump elbows, or perhaps you’ll just stay home from church. Maybe your church has been forced to close because of updated CDC recommendations or a change in a law.

When the pandemic has passed, perhaps relational greetings of human touch will mean a whole lot more — at least for a little while.

Also, if you’re missing church, to be safe, or because it’s the law where you live, remember to continue your Christian generosity. Send in your regular offerings to your church and other ministries. Kingdom work continues, even in a pandemic.

### **Lesson #4:**

This coronavirus is accomplishing something pastors have been trying to get done for a long time. The threat has increased the prayer life of millions of people.

It’s easy to drift from prayer, even for believers. Then a tragedy, threat, or mega-problem arises, and we realize clearly, once again, we ultimately have no control. When all else fails, prayer increases!

It’s clear that God is not happy about the pandemic. He doesn’t cherish suffering. He is not a master of confusion and struggle. However, it’s a sure bet He appreciates the extra chatter coming His way through prayer. Isn’t that ironic?

It is likely that those who don't believe might have a few words of prayer directed toward God themselves. For some, it might be a first. It is probable that God would love for His people to reach out to those who might be praying for the first time — or the first time in a long time.

### **Lesson #5:**

In the U.S. (and perhaps other places around the globe), there is no question people are greatly divided about many issues. In the U.S., the nation is divided about politics, gun control, immigration, and what seems like an endless list of issues.

We can only wonder why it may take a pandemic to unite people. Or will it? Only time will tell. But wouldn't it feel great to be united on something, even if it's survival? In that case, even though God did not make it happen, did He let it happen?

When-life and-death issues become a mainstream conversation, it provides an opportunity to work together to solve the problems. When people work together, it builds relationships. It strengthens relationships of trust. It provides focus — at least on something. What opportunities does that develop?

### **Lesson #6:**

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, God was already doing something among many unbelievers in the U.S. Those who have no relationship with God or the Bible represent about 50 percent of the nation's population.

Without faith, many of these people, from a spiritual perspective, have *increased receptivity* to God. Most Christians don't know this, but this is an incredible season of receptivity, an opportunity to reach out to those in your social network (those in your phone directory) who are unbelievers.

Those who are not practicing faith are deeply concerned already. When you ask them, as we have, "What do you think life will be like for your grandchildren?" many demonstrate a high level of hopelessness. They are discouraged about the large number of senseless killings, the opioid epidemic, the government gridlock, the shooting of police officers, and now, this pandemic.

People without God are vulnerable in their hopelessness. The good news? *Hopelessness breeds receptivity to faith*. Jesus said to His disciples, "Look at the fields; they are ripe and ready for harvest." This coronavirus has increased that receptivity to an all-time high level. Will Christians become "workers for the harvest"? Will you?

### **Lesson #7**

As a believer in Christ, you know what Jesus said to His disciples about the harvest: "Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send workers into His harvest." If you pray as He has asked, you should not be surprised if God answers that prayer. Nor should you be surprised if His answer includes you!

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

1. Think about unchurched people you know in your own social network. These are people who are friends, relatives, neighbors, people at work or school.
2. Pray for them as they face this pandemic.
3. Pray for their receptivity.
4. Ask God to give you an “opening” to share with them.
5. If God opens that door, do what Scripture says: “Be ready at all times to share the *hope* that is in you.” Let them know how you are coping with this pandemic and how God gives you assurance and peace, no matter what happens.
6. You don’t have to quote Bible passages or give a polished speech. Speak from your heart.
7. As you share faith, be real. *Real* is more important than *polished*. Remember, your relationship with the person is the most powerful platform to share your spiritual hope—no matter what happens in the world.
8. If they are responsive, follow through with more communication. If they show signs of being “rattled” at a high level, ask if you can pray for them. Simply pray from your heart. Don’t worry about a “smooth” prayer. Just be “real.” God will do the rest.
9. Pray for God to use this pandemic for many people far from God to come closer to Him.
10. Pray for all those who are afflicted by the virus, all those who are health care workers, all leaders who make strategic decisions, and pray for people to remain safe.

**For your prayer life: Learn from this pandemic. When Jesus called His followers to “make disciples,” His plan was that every believer would share their faith with others. Faith is “caught” through relationships. Pray that you will be used by God to give others the holy infection of faith in Jesus. It changes death to life eternal. Pray for a JESUS EPIDEMIC — sometimes called a revival. Ask God to use you.**