

## COVID-19: Let us not live in a Spirit of Fear-Part I

This experience of COVID-19 is a deep challenge to our faith in God. In St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 4 and verses 6-7, we are told:

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which purposes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

With these thoughts in here are some actions we can take to sustain our body, mind and spirit. If digesting all of the tips in this note is overwhelming in one sitting, just focus on one each day and the scriptural reference to contemplate each day.

What we Can do to Reduce Risk of Exposure to COVID-19

1. We can follow the CDC's recommendations to reduce your risk of exposure:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid retouching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- Wear a mask or protective face covering and gloves when out in public

2. We Can Reduce the Psychological and Spiritual Risk of Exposure to COVID-19

1. Anxiety is normal. It is hard not to be anxious right now with all of the uncertainty, rumors and contradictory information about COVID-19 otherwise known as Coronavirus. Trust that your feelings are normal and valid, and that it is OK to feel whatever you are feeling. You may feel "down" or depressed, apprehensive or just plain fearful as you listen to the news. The invitation to be "anxious for nothing" is an invitation to deepen our trust in God and let God be God, who loves us and is in control, and will never let us go. It is easy to pay lip service to a deep belief in the God of hope and peace when everything is going well. This pandemic causes us to realize that though we would like to control our lives and experiences, we are not in control. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the psalmist reminds us, we will fear no evil, because God is with us and will never let us go. Jesus says to us in John 6: "Be not afraid, I go before you always; come follow me, and will give you rest." He knows where our lives are at this point in time and he knows what shall become of our lives in the future. Today he is calling each one of us to follow him in a more loving and personal way.
2. Worries are normal—about contracting the virus, worrying about loved ones (especially older people or those with compromised immune systems) getting sick, losing income, figuring out childcare, feeling socially isolated or not having enough groceries or other household provisions

to get through the week. All of those worries are real, and they may indeed come to be, and as St Paul reminded Timothy, “You were not given a spirit of timidity or fear, but a spirit of love, power and self- control (self-discipline).” It is at times like these that our faith is tested more than ever before. We have never lived through this kind of dangerous health crisis, nor have we ever been told by the government that we may not go out into the world, to school, to restaurants, to stores. We have also never really been compelled to be obedient to the government, except to pay taxes. Our faith in the God who created us involves love and trust that the God who called us will be the God who protects us. Protection does not mean we will not die; protection in faith is the knowledge that in faith we will rest from our labors and be with Jesus. If we do not believe in the power of the resurrection and that we will be reunited in the kingdom, our faith is in vain. This does not negate the reality of the worry; it just puts it in perspective. Matthew 6:34 reminds us, “...therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

3. Connect with old friends, family you’ve not talked to in a while, people who may be alone or who cross your mind, those who may have no one to talk with. Our busy lives often leave us with no time to do The Dance of Connection. We came from love; we go to love, and love is all around. This time-out period, as we are unable to leave our homes, affords us an opportunity to re-connect with those closest to us and with those from whom we may be separated for whatever reason. We may even be able to get back in touch with ourselves. The artist Paul Klee has said “Being alone is a way back to others and being lonely is a way back to oneself.” I would add that it can be also a way back to God. Relationships are important and need attention to thrive. Let this be that time. We are also faced with the devastation of loved ones in the hospital and alone because of quarantine and no visitors allowed. It is a challenge to us to believe that the medical team becomes their family for such a time as this, and that their care and love helps to usher those who leave us into the arms of Jesus and those who live, back home to us. “A new commandment I give you” Jesus tells his disciples shortly before his death—“that you love one another.” We can be the bearers of the love and peace of Jesus to those who are lonely, or afraid or who have missed connecting with us. This is especially true of connecting with our children and teaching them to connect with relatives and even with adults.
4. Pray. Find a time to reconnect with God in prayer and share what you are feeling inside. Listen carefully, you might be surprised at what you hear. “Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged...Take it to the Lord in prayer...What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” This is the one to whom we go when we are most anxious and afraid. This is the one who calls us o’er the tumult of our lives, in our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease, and he calls, in cares and pleasures, “Christian, love me more than these.” Sometimes when we pray for total healing for ourselves or our loved ones, we are praying for release from illness and freedom to journey to Jesus. All healing does not involve coming back to an earthly home as much as it is a journey of gratitude to a house not made with hands, where the God of love and peace awaits. Watch what you pray for; you just might get it, in God’s time (kairos) more than in our time (chronos).
5. Maintain consistency in your changed routine. Have something that you did regularly before the COVID-19 crisis be part of your daily activities. If you did regular walks, try to keep this up, if permitted by the “shelter-in-home” guidelines. If not, get on that treadmill that has been sitting in the corner. Work or school or church or any regular activity provides us with structures for every day and we become most anxious when we have no structure. We may crave no structure temporarily, but eventually it makes us inefficient and in search for regularity. Our children will tell us that they are bored because their social life has been interrupted by an inability to go to

school. Use this time to help them do something for someone else, including writing a letter or making a card for a lonely person. This week I learned that a 9 and 12-year-old brother and sister found out that a family in their church needed some assistance with food. They knew that the family has five children, so they asked their mom how much a box of cereal and a gallon of milk cost. When the parents came to pick up some food from the food pantry, these children gave the family \$50 of their money, explaining that this would allow each child in the family to have a gallon of milk and a box of cereal. Part of their consistency is doing something for others. A snow day is appreciated; weeks on end without friends and activities becomes tedious. The challenge to family members is to keep children and selves engaged. Service and consistency do that for us.

6. Rest. You may be experiencing difficulty in sleep or have shortened sleep due to various things on your mind. Allow yourself to put those busy thoughts aside and give yourself some moments to rest. Sabbath is very important for our mental, physical and spiritual health. That means turning off the TV, phone, computer or whatever device distracts, and allowing some quiet time to come into your being. Jesus withdrew for quiet time to pray when life got too busy and too complicated. We owe it to ourselves to get off the treadmill of worry and allow the God of peace to permeate our spirits. Quiet practices of meditation, yoga, or simply doing nothing, bring us back to the center of our being, which Howard Thurman called “Our nerve center of Consent”—that place where we say “yes” to God and to life. You cannot go back and “catch up” on rest; build it into your life for your own health. You cannot be there for others if you are not there for yourself. A rested and centered spirit is more equipped to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God, especially in this pandemic.
7. Laugh. Try to think of the humor in situations that’s you are encountering. As is said, laughter is the best medicine. It really works for anxious thoughts. And if you can’t find humor in your situation, remember a funny moment in your experience and share it. It is better when two laugh together. Sarah laughed when told that she would bear a child in her old age. We laugh at the absurdity of life and the opportunities to share with others that joy. No one wants to leave the world having suffered from terminal seriousness. You don’t stop laughing because you grow older. You grow older because you stop laughing. In the Desiderata, found in 1619 carved in the walls of Old St. Paul’s Church in Baltimore, we find these words: “Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.”
8. Seek professional help if anxiety, depression or worries continue to keep you up at night, to plague your thoughts or to interfere with your daily functioning. It is better to talk things out with a skilled professional rather than trying to be “shade tree psychologists”. And this includes our spiritual leaders who will be stressed with all the demands placed on them during this time. Too often it has been a stigma in our community to seek professional help. We need not pathologize the desire to get the help we need to cope, to thrive and to strive to be filled with the joy of Jesus, even in awful times. We are on a journey through the valley of the shadow of death, to the pain of the cross and the joy of the empty tomb. There is always good news that runs alongside or wraps around the challenges of our lives. As we offer to God our anxiety in this pandemic, and as we seek mental and spiritual health, let us then “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to all, the Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is

any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9)

### **Mental Health Resources**

Self-Care and Mindfulness in a Time of Crisis –

[www.facebook.com/kimmecarlosmotivationalspeaker](https://www.facebook.com/kimmecarlosmotivationalspeaker)

Anxiety and Depression Association of America- [www.adaa.org/](http://www.adaa.org/)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance- [www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

Mental Health America- [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

MentalHealth.gov- [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov)

National Alliance on Mental Illness- [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

National Center for PTSD- [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

National Institute of Mental Health- [www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml)

National Suicide Prevention Hotline- [www.suicidepreventionhotline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionhotline.org)

New Jersey Mental Health Cares- [www.njmentalhealthcares.org/](http://www.njmentalhealthcares.org/)

Office of Minority Health- <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov>

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration- [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

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