

4 Ways to Grow Spiritually During COVID-19 Pandemic

The world is in crisis. The coronavirus is *our* crisis.

We didn't choose it, but we must decide how we respond. Will we become paralyzed by fears such as: Am I going to get sick? Will my loved ones catch the virus? Will I permanently lose my job? Can I survive financially?

Providentially, the Bible gives us a different perspective. "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Even with this encouragement, we can decide to just get through it or choose to grow through it. The choice is up to us, but God's desire is that we continue to grow through crisis. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and forever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Grow From Unbelief to Faith

As at few times in history, Christians have an opportunity right now to impact the world for the gospel. Are you ready to grow into the role God selected for you in this present age? It's a challenge, and the Bible points us to a role model. "So then those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:9).

In the book of Genesis, we see a story of Abraham and Sarah growing into the major role God planned for them. Abraham became the patriarch known for his faith, but there were hiccups along the way. His wife Sarah supremely doubted God's ability to perform the miracle promised to her husband. She even hatched a scheme that revealed the depths of her lack of faith.

Instead of waiting on God's provision, Sarah arranged for her maidservant to have a child with Abraham. The man who eventually would be called "Father Abraham" went along with this ill-conceived idea. Sarah's lack of faith resulted in substantial trouble for everyone involved, but the couple's misstep wasn't the end of their story.

God didn't abandon his plan to use them. As God led them through difficult circumstances, their faith grew. Let's look at the process. First God spoke to Abraham. "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward'" (Gen. 15:1). This helped Abraham and Sarah begin to understand where to find their strength: faith in God.

The first step to dealing with any crisis effectively is to stop and listen to God. Pray and read His Word. Next, our response is vitally important. We can choose to believe what the Lord is telling us in the midst of trouble, or we can doubt.

In the course of building and pastoring a medium-sized congregation in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., many challenges have tested my faith and that of our entire congregation. In the early days, missteps could have derailed our ministry. With each trial, God taught me and our ministerial staff how faithful are his promises.

Likewise, our congregation has survived many faith-shaking events. From the attacks of 9/11 to a literal earthquake that shook the city. While 9-11 resonated throughout the world, Washington, D.C., felt the pain of loved ones injured and killed in the Pentagon. By trusting God, we recovered and learned lessons about our faith.

For the individual, believing in forgiveness through Jesus is the starting place of our faith. Just as the Holy Spirit moves

in our hearts to bring us from strangers to sons and daughters of God, our entire journey with the Lord revolves around faith.

To grow through crisis, we need to avail ourselves of God's grace. To live is to face difficulties, even in the best of times. Sometimes, we react well and reflect the light of our Christ. Other times, we make mistakes and fail to live up to our high calling. The key is to grow through accepting God's all-sufficient grace. Crisis merely speeds up and intensifies our opportunities for success and failure. In tough times, we most need to "come with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Grow From Misery to Joy

Before we knew Christ, we lived for the things of this world. Money, power, fame, relationships became the driving force behind our actions. Momentary pleasure or temporary possessions dominated the thinking of many. When the COVID-19 pandemic caused the whole world to pause, it gave people time to reconsider their priorities. Many comforts that we took for granted vanished in short order. With volatility in the stock market, huge fortunes diminished sharply in just a few days. Many people lost their sense of peace and safety. Some people lost their reason for living.

The road to joy begins by making peace with God. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

As believers, we have assurance from Romans 5:2-4 that trouble produces patience that leads to character and hope. As our character grows, we develop hope in the glory of an eternal future with God. Hope turns temporary misery into joy about heaven.

Grow From Ignorance to Knowledge

Tribulation is a valuable teacher. Before David slew Goliath, he first killed a lion and a bear (1 Sam. 17:36). These victories taught David perseverance as he relied on God. Many more difficult times awaited the future king, even after Goliath succumbed. His earlier battles taught him to believe that victory is possible even in difficult circumstances.

One of the most satisfying parts of being a pastor is to lead Christians in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Growth comes through Bible study. The Scriptures teach us about the character of the Lord we serve. Like many other churches, ours places high value on getting individuals into growth groups. Studying the Bible together takes individuals from ignorance about God into fellowship and communion with the body of Christ. Knowledge replaces fear and darkness of the soul. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. Whoever fears is not perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

As we submit our daily situations to the Lord in prayer, we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us about life. God's Word provides perspective that is worth far more than resolution of a single problem or bad situation we've encountered. Our living and active God transforms us and makes us ever more valuable to his Kingdom for the dangerous times ahead.

Grow From Despair to Hope

I can't think of a more profound moment in life than watching a new believer begin to understand that God is love. Our Creator is the one and only hope of the world. In times of crisis, Jesus leads us by his example. Though in the short run, the Lord saw the pain and despair of the cross ahead of him, He clung to the hope of the Resurrection. In a similar way, we have the incredible opportunity to provide this hope to those around us.

As growing Christians rooted in God's Word, we have love to

share in every situation. “And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). God’s love bubbles up from our inner being into our daily interactions. If we trust in the Lord, times of crisis drive us to our knees. When we arise from prayer, the Holy Spirit enlivens our steps to help those around us. Perhaps now more than ever, our families, friends and coworkers need to see God’s love shine through in our words and actions. {eoa}

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