

Death by Starvation or Death by COVID-19

As horrible as death by COVID-19 must be, it is surely far worse to starve to death slowly over a period of many weeks and months. Yet, in our desire to prevent millions of COVID-19 deaths, we may have sentenced tens of millions of people to starve to death. Perhaps more than 100 million. That is almost impossible to grasp. What would those figures look like on a graph?

Dennis Prager's latest weekly article, posted May 5, put forth this jarring proposition: "The Worldwide Lockdown May Be the Greatest Mistake in History."

Whether or not he is right, only time will tell.

But Prager could already cite these disturbing projections: "The United Nations World Food Programme, or the WFP, states that by the end of the year, more than 260 million people will face starvation—double last year's figures. According to WFP director David Beasley on April 21: 'We could be looking at famine in about three dozen countries. ... There is also a real danger that more people could potentially die from the economic impact of COVID-19 than from the virus itself.'"

He added, "That would be enough to characterize the worldwide lockdown as a deathly error. But there is much more. If global GDP declines by 5%, another 147 million people could be plunged into extreme poverty, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute."

Why so little outcry? Why so little concern?

It is true that headlines reported the WFP announcement, with headlines like this on April 22 on The Hill: "UN warns coronavirus could cause global famines of 'biblical

proportions.’ The WFP warned the United Nations security council Tuesday of a possible ‘hunger pandemic’ due to COVID-19.”

Or like this, also on April 22, on CNN: “Coronavirus pandemic will cause global famines of ‘biblical proportions,’ UN warns.”

One week later, a local Fox affiliate ran a similar story, explaining, “While the World Health Organization warns that stringent guidelines need to stay in place to combat the spread of COVID-19, fellow United Nations agency World Food Program (WFP) believes that it will lead to an uptick in global poverty and starvation, and the response to the virus itself may end up killing more people by the end of 2020.”

But for the most part, these absolutely shocking predictions have gone in one ear and out the other.

Is it because the victims are almost all in impoverished nations, already out of sight and out of mind?

Is it because we are already indifferent to the fate of roughly 130 million people who face starvation every year?

I’m not trying to lay a guilt trip on all of us who have plenty to eat. Nor am I trying to go back to the days of my childhood, when my mother would urge me to finish my dinner, reminding me that there were children starving in India or Africa. (And yes, I had some snide response, probably asking how finishing my meal would help these children, or offering the remaining food to them.)

I’m also not trying to be a Monday morning quarterback, criticizing the world response as lacking in foresight. For me to do so would be as ignorant as it would be arrogant.

My purpose, instead, is twofold.

First, I want to bring this tragic situation into focus again,

even without the added crisis of the COVID-19 shutdown.

As explained in a Mercy Corps article posted Oct. 1, 2018, "Around the world, 821 million people do not have enough of the food they need to live an active, healthy life. One in every nine people goes to bed hungry each night, including 20 million people currently at risk of famine in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria.

"People suffering from chronic hunger are plagued with recurring illnesses, developmental disabilities and low productivity. They are often forced to use all their limited physical and financial resources just to put food on the table."

Whatever we can do to help make a difference in these lives, let us do so. I support missionaries working in some very poor countries, and the stories they share of lives changed, simply through Christian love and a healthy meal, are wonderfully encouraging.

Second, as we consider the negative impact of the shutdown in America, where the cure could be worse than the disease, let us factor in the implications for the impoverished worldwide.

Naturally, we give more thought to our local economy and our own paychecks, which is perfectly understandable. But we should not forget those affected negatively worldwide. It is literally a matter of life or death.

Of course, there are no easy answers, and hindsight is 20/20. But I, too, read these shocking predictions on April 22, only to file them away in my brain, only to forget them within 24 hours.

So, I'm jogging my own memory as well as, hopefully, jarring your own thoughts as well.

At the least, we can pray that God will give our leaders and

the leaders of the world great wisdom. And at the most, we can consider ways that we can help alleviate world hunger.

It is an ongoing tragedy that could become much more tragic. If we each make a difference even in one life, that is not just a tragedy averted. It is a precious life saved.