

10 Things the Church Must Do in Response to the Coronavirus

In all my years I have never seen this kind of panic related to the potential spread of an illness. The kind of panic and fear I observe regularly on the faces of the public almost rivals what I observed when I was in Manhattan after the Twin Towers were toppled and the Pentagon attacked on Sept. 11, 2001! As always, I try to ponder how the church should respond during these experiences.

The following are 10 things the church must do during this present global situation:

1. Discern between political hyperbole and reality.

I am amazed with how opportunistic so many political leaders are during this crisis! Unfortunately, the media usually garners followers by sensationalizing everything that happens so as to drive traffic toward their platform (to acquire more advertising sponsors).

The church has to learn to see beyond groupthink, politics and media, and discern the difference between hype and reality.

2. Teach public and private health.

The church has an obligation to post relative information related to public health measures that must be practiced to curtail the spread of the virus. Since the body of Christ has consistent, weekly gatherings, it is a matter of stewardship that we cooperate with reasonable guidelines disseminated by public health and city officials.

3. Pray for the opportunity to share the gospel with people afraid of dying.

This is an amazing opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus! Jesus has already destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (See 2 Tim. 1:10.) Times like these confront humanity with their own mortality and force them to think about eternity.

True Christ followers should have no fear of death; consequently, everyone we meet walking in fear should be a candidate to hear the gospel during these days.

4. Earnestly fast and pray for a global spiritual awakening.

The whole world, with its vast scientific, technological advances and burgeoning affluence, is being confronted with their frailty and fragility. They continually find out that there are many things that are beyond their control! I believe the time is ripe for a global "Great Awakening," as the pride of humanity is being brought low and masses of people are being unsettled by this virus and other huge challenges.

5. Pray for our nation's leaders.

One of the primary things all churches should do when they gather is pray for our political leaders (see 2 Tim. 2:1-4). The potential problems associated with a pandemic are way beyond the scope of their learning and expertise.

The present issues related to public health are negatively affecting global travel, the stock market, numerous businesses and national security. In light of all this, it is very difficult to plan for adequate contingencies. Now, more than ever, the body of Christ needs to intercede for leaders and believe that God will grant them a spirit of humility, cooperation (instead of political competition) and wisdom as they interface with experts in the fields of health, national security, commerce and international relations.

6. Care for vulnerable church members.

The Bible makes it clear that the church is called to do good to all men—but especially to the household of faith (see Gal. 6:10). We especially need to look out for older and disabled church members who do not have the adequate resources from family members to get by. We also have to make sure they have adequate food and hygienic supplies if panic shopping precludes their ability to purchase these necessities.

7. Look for ways to love our neighbor.

In every community there are vulnerable people. During a panic, the population goes into survival mode and its default position is “every man is for himself.” We need to look out for ways to behave differently from the world in this present distress. Part of how we can do this is by making sure the elderly, disabled and other groups of vulnerable people have all they need regarding food, toiletries and care.

In the midst of this atmosphere, believers can shine like bright lights to the world (see Phil. 2:15) as they put others before themselves and mimic the attitude of the Lord Jesus (see Phil. 2:4-12).

8. Proactively learn preventative health, not only divine healing.

I rarely get sick—even if I am around people who have the flu and other contagious ailments. In 36 plus years of overseeing a local church, I have never missed a Sunday service because of a sickness. This is because—as a matter of godly stewardship—I have taken the time to study nutrition, get enough sleep, exercise regularly and practice regular fasting.

Most of the deaths from the coronavirus are among those who already had underlying health issues, whose immune system was already compromised. Consequently, the average person who is constantly eating processed food, snacking in between their (many) meals, as well as eating late at night, will compromise their immune system. This is because much of our body’s energy

is going toward digesting food; hence, if your body's energy is depleted, it doesn't have enough in the tank to restore itself and focus on fighting off sickness and disease.

Also, if you are consuming a lot of animal-based products and processed food, it takes a huge toll on your body, since these are difficult to digest (which leads to inflammation, which is the root cause of cancer, arthritis and other serious maladies).

The plant-based diet of Genesis 1:29 is actually the "species specific" diet God granted to human beings. Thankfully, more and more scientific studies are confirming the amazing health benefits of this diet. (Out of the numerous studies there are now some compelling documentaries, such as *The Game Changers* on Netflix, *Fork Over Knives*, as well as countless others (Dr. Jason Fung is known as a health expert on the benefits of water fasting and there are numerous videos of his teaching on YouTube)).

Consequently, I only eat two to three meals per day, with no eating in between meals, and I fast about 15-20 hours most days. I have enough energy to keep a demanding schedule while participating in rigorous physical training. This discipline related to my biological health enables me to frequently travel, write, preach, pray and spend quality time with my family in spite of the fact that I am over 60 years old. Also, if a person wants to take further precaution before traveling and going into a public space, taking strong probiotics first thing in the morning and having adequate doses of Vitamin C may aid in immunity enhancement.

Unfortunately, many believers think they can violate natural law and live recklessly because they can pray for divine healing. However, the same God who said "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex. 15:26) is the same God who gave us species specific guidelines related to diet (Gen. 1:29). Although I am a huge proponent of divine healing, I also believe it is a

matter of stewardship to do our part in caring for our physical health.

9. Stay on top of current events.

The church is called to function on the leading edge of proactive prophetic action as well as rapid response. In order to function this way, we need to operate similar to the “sons of Issachar,” who were men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do (see 1 Chr. 12:32). Consequently, every believer has to be regularly informed regarding current events and be mobilized to serve in the workplace, not just within church buildings.

10. Fear not!

With the nonstop panic being generated by incessant media hype related to the spread of the coronavirus, the general populace is engulfed with a spirit of fear. This is an opportune time for Christ followers to arise and be the exemplars who operate in faith and wisdom instead of fear.

How can we do this? Is it because believers embrace a form of fideism or mysticism, or is our faith rooted in reality?

Scripture makes it clear that we are to “fear not” and that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind (see Isa. 41:10 and 2 Tim. 1:7). This is because believers are rooted and grounded in the God of creation who alone should be their trust, fortress and foundation of faith. Hence, since we are grounded in the One who created the cosmos, we are commanded to fear not, even when the earth is quaking and unstable (see Ps. 46). Moreover, because Jesus conquered death through His resurrection and has the keys of hell and death, He also tells His followers to “fear not”! (See Revelation 1:17-18).

In conclusion, Christ followers are not to fear what the world fears (see Jer. 10:2) and are not to be conformed to this

world system (Rom. 12:1-2). Whenever a global crisis breaks out, the church is called to discern the times, know what to do, and function as the salt of the earth and light of the world.