

By Todd Wagner - The Gospel Coalition

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## **Worry is not our friend and panic is not our way.**

With the [increasing coronavirus cases outside of China](#), many believers across the United States wonder how to respond to the increasing alarm. What would God have us do in the face of a growing international health crisis? Should our churches close their doors for fear of spreading illness? Should I take my kids out of school? Cancel travel plans?

## **How should we help a panicked world?**

### **Remember What We Know**

First, it's important to be reminded about what we already know. Worry is not our friend, and panic is not our way. Solomon reminds us, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" ([Prov. 24:10](#)). May it never be said that God's people are governed more by fear than faith.

Corrie ten Boom, along with other faithful from among the nations, led courageously in the face of the Nazi fascism—a different form of deadly virus. And she reminds us, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength."

In times of crisis, the world needs steady people who are strengthened by God's grace and selfless by God's power. Worry accomplishes nothing except weakness of heart and head. It's been said that 90 percent of the things we worry or become panicked about never happen, and the other 10 percent are outside our control.

While we remain on alert against viruses of doctrine or disease, worrying won't change our circumstances or lower our chance of infection. It won't help us fight off illness or move us to action. Worrying about COVID-19 (or anything else) will only increase trouble. Rather than worrying and being anxious, Jesus calls us to respond with prayer and faith in him ([Matt. 6:33–34](#); [Phil. 4:6](#)). We need not worry ultimately because we know the One who has defeated sin and death ([1 Cor. 15:55–57](#)).

Remind yourself continually: it takes the same amount of energy to worry as to pray. One leads to peace, the other to panic. Choose wisely.

### **Love Well and Trust Him**

If God calls us to worry about anything, it's how to love people well. The psalmist encourages us, "Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness" ([Ps. 37:3](#)). Peter reminds us to press on in the midst of every evil. Whether

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persecutions or pandemics, we can trust in the Lord, knowing, “It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” ([1 Pet. 3:17](#)).

Worry is common to man. But God has called us to face troubles and threats with courage, leaning our weight on him.

Throughout history, Christians have often stood out because they were willing to help the sick even during plagues, pandemics, and persecutions. They loved people and weren’t afraid of death because they understood that “to live is Christ and to die is gain” ([Phil. 1:21](#)). By stepping into the mess of sickness and disease, they were able to demonstrate their faith to a watching world. So, rather than just asking “How do I stay healthy?” perhaps we should be also ask “How can I help the sick?” Let’s be quick to help and slow to hide in basements.

Prayer-infused confidence, compassion, and selflessness should mark how we talk about the coronavirus. Why? Because our Savior put on flesh ([John 1:14](#)) and stepped into our sickness, sin, and death. He healed the sick and cared for the hurting. We must do likewise.

### **We Can Be Careful, Too**

None of this means we should be reckless. Neither Christ’s love nor God’s Word encourages careless risks, but both promote obedience. Loving the sick doesn’t mean we intentionally infect ourselves ([Prov. 22:3](#)). If infection becomes a legitimate risk (at the moment, the Center for Disease Control says the virus isn’t communally spreading in the United States, and the health risk is low), responding to the coronavirus likely means taking [small practical steps](#) like washing our hands and staying home if we’re sick.

Before you think of canceling church services, ask, “How can we care for those at risk?” As others get sick, care for them. Are most of you still healthy? That’s a great reason to gather for thanksgiving and prayer. Seek appropriate medical care as symptoms arise and don’t forsake caring for one another.

Follow the example of those who’ve acted faithfully in the past. In 19th-century England, when thousands were dying of cholera, Charles Spurgeon visited homes to care for people. The church of Jesus in Wuhan China, the virus’s epicenter, is [faithfully leading even today](#).

Finally, as you watch the world react to this crisis—itsself a stark reminder of our mortality—don’t neglect to share the hope you have in Jesus ([1 Pet. 3:15](#)). Share how

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he rescued you from the universal epidemic of sin and the penalty of death. Share that your hope is not found in remaining healthy this side of heaven.

We'll all face death eventually. Thanks to Jesus, we can come to that day with confidence. Like Paul, we can remember that to live is Christ, but to die is gain ([Phil. 1:21](#)). We truly have nothing ultimate to fear—not from the coronavirus, [the Ebola virus](#), natural disasters, or anything else.

Press on, friends. Pray for the sick. Walk in God's strength. Love the brotherhood. Do good to all men. Use your health to serve, not to hide. Jesus is sovereign over it all. And we are immortal until God's work for us to do is finished.