

# SURVIVING AND THRIVING THROUGH COVID-19

Just as God helped Daniel spend a lifetime advising kings through difficult times, He will help you be active and helpful in confronting coronavirus (COVID-19). God has not given us a spirit of fear but power, love, and sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). In the weeks to come, Free Will Baptist people and churches should become an asset in responding to this crisis rather than a liability (Matthew 10:16-20). This simple guide offers suggestions for church members, pastors, and ministries.

## Church Members: Be Examples

- + **Have the right perspective:** COVID-19 has not surprised God (Isaiah 46:10; 42:9). Consider how He might use these events in your life and the lives of others (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). Avoid false guilt. Understand COVID-19 may limit normal activities, including church attendance. Remember, God is still working even when we do not gather corporately.
- + **Start the day with spiritual disciplines** (Daniel 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11).
- + **Read a variety of materials:** Bible, devotional guides, discipleship books, and theology books. This is an opportunity to go deeper in a particular area or areas.
- + **Exercise regularly** (1 Corinthians 6:19). Go for a walk; continue cardio exercise or stretching. Move around.
- + **Get out of the house.** Take a walk; work in the yard. Nature reminds us of God's sovereignty (Psalm 8:3-4).
- + **Limit news and social media** to certain times during the day (2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Timothy 1:4; Isaiah 35:4). Be intentional about controlling your mood (Proverbs 25:28). Avoid binge watching or mindless activity.
- + **Establish a routine and redeem the time** (Ephesians 5:16):
  - Get up and go to bed at the same time.
  - Maintain Bible reading and prayer.
  - Keep regular eating habits.
  - Read, study, and teach. Disciple others using digital means.
  - Check in with accountability partners.
- + **Contact friends, loved ones, and church family regularly** (Philippians 2:4; Galatians 6:2).
- + **Minister to others** (Matthew 25:34-40):
  - Send encouraging letters.
  - Be prepared to care for the sick.
  - Deliver food and supplies to those at risk.
  - Support law enforcement and medical personnel.
- + **Give** (Acts 20:35). Continue supporting your local church and ministries that count on you.
- + **Pray** (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

## Pastors: Be Shepherds

- + **Encourage faith, not fear** (Mark 4:39-40; Psalm 46). Focus on sharing facts and exhibiting calm leadership.
- + **Follow the directions of government leaders** to help contain the virus by following recommended precautions (Romans 13). Be part of the solution for authorities rather than a problem (Matthew 10:16). Be salt and light during a dark time (Matthew 5:13-16).
- + **Identify needs of your people** and seek to meet those needs (Hebrews 12:12-14).
- + **Stay in close contact with your congregation** (Acts 20:28):
  - Stream services and encourage your congregation to interact on social media during services.
  - Encourage church families to post pictures of themselves watching online services.
  - Provide interactive online Bible studies through Facetime™, Skype™, Zoom™ or other online platforms.
  - Encourage your leadership team to make contacts during midweek service time.
  - Post encouragement on social media and send cards and letters.
- + **Deliver necessary supplies to high-risk individuals.**
- + **Offer counseling** via digital communication (Proverbs 25:11).
- + **Avoid complaining** about the difficulties facing your church (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Remember that everyone is dealing with an elevated stress level throughout the crisis.
- + **Establish online giving.** Church expenses continue (and may increase) during this pandemic. Take steps to help your congregation continue giving faithfully. Visit: <https://get.tithe.ly/partner/nafwb>
- + **Avoid criticism of churches** and church leaders who do not handle the situation as you would (James 4:11).

## Ministry: Be Problem Solvers

- + **Use this time for strategic planning** (Luke 14:28-33).
- + **Study your community and identify needs** (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Do things you have wanted to do but the time never seemed to be available.
- + **Improve your website and social media presence** (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
- + **Engage in hard conversations with other church leaders** to determine the best way forward (James 1:5-6).
- + **Embrace partnerships with other Christian groups** for the sake of greater impact (1 Corinthians 1:10).
- + **Determine how your church can assist** medical and law enforcement personnel (1 Timothy 2:2).
- + **Encourage qualified church members to provide nursing** and care for those affected (James 5:13-15).

## Helping the Anxious

- + **Represent.** Remember, you are God's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20) and His burden bearer (Galatians 6:2).
- + **Listen.** Let them share concerns. Don't worry about giving advice; just listen (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19).
- + **Care.** Consider how they feel (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Have compassion (Matthew 9:36).
- + **Respond.** Fight the urge to ask questions. Instead, paraphrase what they've said. Encourage them (Hebrews 3:13) and validate their fears.

- + **Read.** Ask if you can read Scripture to them (Acts 8:4-5; 8). Read a passage like Psalm 23, 46, or Philippians 4:4-13.
- + **Pray** (Hebrews 4:15-16). Pray for them aloud, by name, and specifically. Pray Scripture and insert their name (Numbers 6:24-26). The Lord bless [insert name] and keep [insert name]...

## A Prescription for Fear

- + **Start the day rejoicing** (Philippians 4:4). Read the Bible and see the character and characteristics of God.
- + **Face Your Fear.** What is the worst that could happen? Whatever it is, God will help you (Matthew 28:20).
- + **Pray.** Take whatever is bothering you straight to the Lord and ask for His help (Philippians 4:6).
- + **Combat negative thoughts** (2 Corinthians 10:5). Take a walk; get outside. Look for examples of God's care for you in what you see (Matthew 6:25-34).
- + **Focus on the Scripture.** When a fearful thought arises, combat it with a favorite Scripture. When you think you won't make it, read passages like Psalm 121.
- + **Think rightly.** Limit your intake of media or anything else that increases your distress. Be intentional about what you view, read, or watch (Philippians 4:8).
- + **End the Day Well.** Our brains dwell on what we think about before bedtime (Psalm 63:6). Avoid media and spend time in the Word (Psalm 1) and talking to the Lord, which leads to peace (Philippians 4:6).

## Helping the Depressed

- + **Observe.** Watch people, especially those who have struggled in the past, for signs they may be in trouble (Genesis 40:6). Note posts on social media, and the way they interact.
- + **Listen.** Notice voice tone and what they talk about. Do they repeat the same concerns over and over (1 Kings 19:10, 14)? Are they ruminating, dwelling on negative thoughts? Listen for signs they feel worthless (1 Kings 19:4), and a preoccupation with death (Psalm 88:3-6).
- + **Note key symptoms.** Those who are depressed tend to feel badly most of the day (Psalm 6:2-3, 6), have trouble with their sleep (Psalm 102:7), appetite problems (Psalm 102:4-5), and fatigue (Psalm 102:3). They tend to exaggerate or distort problems (1 Kings 19:10, 14). This is more than having a bad day.
- + **Respond.** Help them become grounded in reality as God helped Elijah. Faulty thinking says "I am the only one who is faithful" (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Truth says "There are 7,000 others" (1 Kings 19:18).
- + **Act.** Help the depressed person get active. Attack the problem one bite at a time. Use God's example with Elijah. Go back to work (1 Kings 19:15). Work the problem (1 Kings 19:17-21). As a result, Elijah was restored (1 Kings 21:17-29). Rather than being fearful and depressed, he was emboldened and courageous.
- + **Find the inn.** Some people will need professional help to get through depression. Be like the Good Samaritan and help them find the inn (Luke 10:34). Encourage them and be willing to take them to a health care professional for further assessment and to follow their treatment recommendations.

## Defeating Depression

- + **Assess.** Are you always sad (Psalm 6:6), feel problems will never end (Psalm 6:2-3), have no appetite (Psalm 102:4-5), problems sleeping (Psalm 102:7), fatigue (Psalm 102:3-4), and feel worthless (1 Kings 19:4)?
- + **Admit** the problem. Don't pretend it isn't happening. Some deny Christians can be depressed, but we find clear examples in Scripture (1 Kings 19:4, Jeremiah 20:14, James 5:17).
- + **Share** your difficulties with the Lord. Tell Him exactly how you feel (Psalm 42:4, Jeremiah 20:14-15).
- + **Confide** in others who will challenge you to think rightly (Proverbs 27:17). Talk to a professional helper (Proverbs 15:22)
- + **Monitor** thinking. Log your thoughts. Are they accurate (1 Kings 19:10, 14)? Or do they exaggerate, accept falsehood (Elijah), or dwell on negative thoughts?
- + **Push** back negative thoughts with the truth (1 Kings 19:18). Feel worthless? Focus on God's view of you (Psalm 139:13-14). Feel guilty? Embrace God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- + **Get out** and active. Dark places contribute to your difficulty. Get "out of the cave" (1 Kings 19:9) and into routine (1 Kings 19:5, 7). Get up and go to bed at the same time. Be active (walk, garden, bike).
- + **Address** the physical. Work on good sleep, hygiene, and eat at the same times and intervals (1 Kings 19:7-8). Take prescribed medication (1 Timothy 5:13; 2 Kings 20:7).
- + **Choose life and hope.** If you feel you would rather end your life, remember how hard it would be for those who love you (Judges 16:31). Family and friends always will be worse off without you. Understand it will get better. Hope in the Lord (2 Corinthians 4:17). Remember God will never leave you (Isaiah 41:10, 13) or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

## Helping Those With Complicated Grief

Complicated grief is different from other types of grief. People risk complicated grief after losing a loved one to trauma. It is especially associated with an inability to say goodbye. How can you help? (Psalm 34:18)

- + **Be There.** After a traumatic event, people often say, "If you need me, call me." Go out of the way to get to the person who has experienced loss (Proverbs 18:24). Your presence (Matthew 26:38), even without words, is all that is needed (Job 2:11-13).
- + **Listen.** If the grieving person feels safe with you, be prepared to hear hard things (Job 3:1-3, 11-13, 26). Don't correct them (Job 4:1-2) or fix them (Job 4:7). Be careful about what you say (Job 16:2; 42:7).
- + **Care.** Put yourself in the place of the person who has experienced loss (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Think about experiencing the loss he or she has experienced. This will prevent hurtful words (Job 30:29).
- + **Act.** Look for specific actions that will help (Matthew 25:35-40). Deliver a meal, clean their yard, pick up dry cleaning, or shine shoes for the funeral. Remove a small burden or task for them (James 1:27).
- + **Pray.** There is no quick, easy fix for complicated grief. Ask God to ease the pain (Romans 8:26), and to help them feel the presence of the Comforter (John 14:26).
- + **Remember them.** Grief ebbs and flows, but a complicated loss will remain in some way until we are with the Lord. One can be overcome suddenly by a loss that took place years ago (Genesis 37:28, 50:17). Never forget the survivors of complicated grief, especially on the anniversary of the event, birthdays, or other special days (Revelation 21:3-4).

## Loving One Another: Helping Others Through COVID-19

- + **Find a Way.** Now more than ever we must fulfill our calling to love one another (John 13:34-35; John 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10). Though we long to be physically present (1 Peter 5:14) we must find other ways (phone, FaceTime, ZOOM) to be there for one another (Romans 1:10-12)
- + **Make contact** and listen to concerns. Try to assess what they are experiencing (Philippians 2:4).
- + **Encourage.** Try to be an encouragement about the things concerning them (Hebrews 3:13).
- + **Act.** If you are gifted in a needed area, use that gift to help (1 Peter 4:10). Think of specific ways you can lighten a burden (Galatians 6:2). Brainstorm ways to address their needs (Hebrews 10:24).
- + **Read a Scripture** that has been a blessing to you. Maybe even sing together (Ephesians 5:19).
- + **Pray** for each other specifically and by name (James 5:16).

## Coping With Grief

- + **Grieve.** It's okay to grieve. Everyone will grieve at different points in life (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4). Godly people grieve (Acts 8:2); even Jesus grieved (John 11:33-36, 38).
- + **Recognize** how grief impacts you physically (Job 7:13-14), psychologically (Job 6:2-3), socially (Job 16:2; 19:13-14; 30:9-10), and spiritually (Job 6:8-9; 10:2; 13:3; 23:3-7, 31:5).
- + **Prepare** for especially difficult times like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. The most spiritually and psychologically mature individual can be overcome by grief in certain settings (Genesis 42:21-24; 43:30). Give yourself grace since grief has no time limits (Genesis 37:28; 50:15-17).
- + **Be Patient.** Hold on (Job 2:3; 2:9-10; 27:5-6) and be established (James 5:7-11). Remember it will get better (Matthew 11:28-30).
- + **Keep praying,** even when you don't know what to pray (Romans 8:26). Pray Scripture. The Psalmist prayed (Psalm 22:1-2; 23:4). Jesus prayed (Matthew 27:46) and understands what you are experiencing (Hebrews 4:15). God is with you (Psalm 34:18) and will help you (John 14:16-17).
- + **Keep reading the Scriptures.** As we enter God's presence, we can see Him working, even in our grief (Genesis 50:20). Our concerns sometimes melt away (Job 40:3-4; 42:1-6). We can rely upon Him to get us through (Psalm 46)
- + **Hope.** We have real hope (Job 13:15; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Keep looking for the day when all pain will be wiped away (Revelation 21:3-4).

