

What in the World was God Doing in COVID-19?

The coronavirus has plunged the world into crisis mode in only weeks: countries closing borders, overwhelmed hospitals turning away stroke victims to care for COVID-19 patients, school closures, empty public places, stocks tumbling, and stay-at-home notices enforced. Opinions and fake news abound with finger-pointing in all directions based on fear, anger, and political bias.

But *what was God doing* in all this? What if we could ask him—and then, what if we listened to his answer? What would he say? What was God telling us?¹

Life is fragile.

But God, I already know this! You have spoken through your Word:

“O God, remember that my life is but a breath,
and I will never again feel happiness” (Job 7:7).

“You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.
My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;
at best, each of us is but a breath” (Ps 39:5).

We typically think tragedy happens to the other guy, not to us. Yet God shows us that we’re so vulnerable that disaster can strike us even from a virus that someone can sneeze on us. Maybe we aren’t the masters of our fate as much as we thought.

Relationships matter.

Well, we thought we knew this, too—at least intellectually. People need God, but they also need one another. Today [March 19, 220] was the 90th birthday of the man who raised me, but he is quarantined in his assisted care room where even my mother cannot visit him. The best the family could do was to sing “Happy Birthday” up to his second-floor window from the street below as he lay in bed. The pain of a prohibited birthday party and canceled flights of loved ones remind us how communal we humans are.

Relational distances can often be a hindrance for missionaries like us. Our three sons and our baby grandson now live across the Pacific. Likewise, my wife tried to be at her Dad’s side for his entrance into heaven in 2005. She really did try—traveling to the USA six times in a year and a half. Yet she bade him farewell by phone moments before his passing.

So, God, would you help us become more creative in loving others? Even in our social distancing from people at church, you are telling us not to hibernate at home. You are giving us new ways to reach out. Even though we long to hug others as we did in the past, help us show your warmth even in the “elbow handshakes” and the increased use of our webcam to our family, our church friends, and those we teach. This is because we need flexibility as you teach us to...

Embrace new realities.

“The LORD replied,
‘Look around at the nations;
Look and be amazed!
For I am doing something in your own day,
Something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it’” (Hab 1:5).

Who would have believed that universities around the globe would send their students to their home countries mid-semester indefinitely? Who could have guessed that the US Congress would

¹ All Scripture is from *The New Living Translation: Second Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Charitable Trust, 1996, 2004).

vote to give each American \$1200 in aid in 2020? Habakkuk could hardly believe that God would raise the cruel Babylonians to punish wayward Judah. God is also telling us that he knows what he is doing when things are out of our control:

“‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the LORD.
‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts’” (Isa 55:8-9).

Get ready. It will get worse.

Think of the past. Don't forget the plagues of “biblical proportions” that killed numerous Egyptians (Gen 12:17; Exod 8–12) and Israelites (Exod 32:35), where even 14,700 died in one day (Num 16:47-50). Don't forget the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919 that killed about 2% of the world.²

In the same way, while COVID-19 does not fulfill Bible prophecy, other diseases will get worse in the days ahead. The fourth horseman of the Apocalypse will cause one-fourth of the world to die by “sword and famine and disease and wild animals” (Rev 6:8). I find it incredible that some think this has already been fulfilled in history—if so, when? As our present times are unprecedented on a global scale due to the virus, unprecedented days lie ahead. God is giving us a small taste of judgment to come. Are we listening? Are we preparing by placing our trust in him by believing in his Son, Jesus Christ?

Seek God now.

Many say that things are falling apart. In reality, things are *falling together*. How? The Lord Jesus Christ holds all things together: “He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together” (Col 1:17).

So what should we do? Isaiah lived in a day when he saw the nation of Israel to his north destroyed, as well as 46 cities of his land of Judah. His advice is appropriate for our own time as well.

“Seek the LORD while you can find him.
Call on him now while he is near” (Isa 55:6).

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² “Spanish Flu: The Deadliest Pandemic in History,” All About History, Live Science, 13 March 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/spanish-flu.html>.