



Addressing the Fears of Present Times

When problems rush in faster than we can process solutions, we PANIC! As we face this COVID19 pandemic, we feel much like the disciples when a sudden storm rocked their world on the Sea of Galilee. When we can't see God at work in our lives, we're afraid. But witnessing His power on display can be frightening as well. How do we move from fear to faith? Maybe the answer lies in examining our expectations. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment as you read the following Word of God from St. Mark 4: 35-41:

³⁵That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him.³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't You care if we drown?"³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.⁴⁰ He said to His disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"

COVID-19 is doing more than threatening our physical health, for many, it's affecting their mental and emotional health as well. Have you ever asked in prayer or cried out: "God, don't You care? Don't You care about this terrible virus that is taking lives and inconveniencing our daily lives?" And then we take one gaze at the Cross and we know the answer. God cares. He didn't send the virus. But He is with us in the midst of this awful pandemic and He alone calms our hearts. Since He calmed a horrific storm with His Word, He does the same with His Word today. Let His Word calm your troubled heart and give you His peace.

Let us pray. Lord God, You have been our Refuge and Tower of strength. You have saved us when we were afraid and calmed us when we were filled from head to toe with fear. Teach us not to fear this pandemic, O Lord, but to have faith in You. Send us Your Holy Spirit to grant us faith that trusts in You completely - no matter what our current circumstances. Teach us not to fear Your power, O Lord, but to expect it. Give us the faith to live in the shadow of Your mighty power. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The coming months will likely be full of disappointment, sacrifice, and mourning. But, as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can also look to the months ahead and anticipate joy, personal growth, and new opportunities to live out our faith. With that being said, the best thing we can do right now is pray. Don't throw in the towel with every newscast, but wrap the towel around you like a prayer shawl and share with God all that is on your heart and mind. Remember, prayer doesn't change our good and gracious God, it changes us to be in line with His will and ways. We take our own burdens and the burdens of others to the Lord in prayer. For all of us affected by COVID-19, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope"* (Romans 15:13).

WE PRAY FOR THE ISOLATED

Father God, I have never felt so alone. I could never have imagined facing something like this on my own and I'm afraid. Please remind me that You are with me and your promise to never leave me nor forsake me. Allow me to trust Your enduring presence. Remind me that, as Your child, You have not given me a spirit of fear. Remind me that I can trust You with whatever may come. Lord, this isolation is overwhelming. I know I could pick up the phone and call someone, but I don't want to be a burden. Please help me to have concern for others above myself. I know I'm not the only one feeling lonely, give me the courage to reach out and offer encouragement to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR THOSE ASKING, "GOD, ARE YOU THERE?"

God, I've never really talked to you before like this - when I'm not even sure what to pray or ask of You. Are You really there? Can You really hear me? I know people who claim to know You but are constantly talking about stress, worry and fear. How can this be? You say in Your Word, "Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Would You help me to believe? Would You open my eyes and heart to You? Would You give me faith to believe in You and trust You? While I'm stuck at home, would You please guide me to online sources where I can learn more about You. I want to know the comfort that You alone give to Your people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR THOSE INFECTED BY THE VIRUS

Father God, I never imagined that I would get this virus. I read and heard about it every day and yet I figured I was somehow exempt. I trust You, but I confess I'm afraid of the unknown. I don't know how bad my symptoms will get, and I hate knowing I might have infected other people before I knew I was sick. You are the Great Physician, and so I pray for Your healing grace. I pray that I don't end up in the hospital and I pray that I didn't spread this to other people. Give me courage to face the day. Give me the self-discipline to rest and take care of my body while I'm recovering. Help me to praise You, even in this storm. Help me to glorify You with my attitude even in this trial. Help me to spread hope, not fear. Remind me that while I don't know what my future holds, I know who holds my future - Your almighty hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR THE FRUSTRATED

Lord, I am so frustrated. I want to make sure I have what my family needs during this time. I see people not taking this pandemic seriously, and I see other people hoarding supplies so that others can't get what they need. Help me with my attitude towards these people. Help me to hold my tongue on social media, to be light and salt (Matthew 5) and an encourager, not a sharp-tongued slanderer. Remind me that we all want to keep our families safe, and we all react differently to fear. Remind me to pray for those who are causing frustration, not to be angry with them. Help me to be an example by following the guidelines set forth by our authorities, and also by putting the needs of others before my own by offering to help my neighbors if they are in need. Lord, may Your will always be done. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN FEAR

Father God, I don't even have words for what I'm feeling. My stomach is tied up in knots, my thoughts are skipping so fast I can't keep up. I'm exhausted but I can't rest. My dreams at night are as stressful as my thoughts during the day. Excessive hand-washing has left my skin raw. Social distancing has left me feeling more alone than ever. I could call a friend, but I'm afraid they won't understand. I need help. Please help me to calm down. Since You alone can speak to a fierce storm and it immediately is calmed, speak Your Word to my heart and mind. Help me to stay focused on You. Help me to not be afraid. I feel paralyzed. Please take this feeling from me and give me courage, strength, and an unwavering trust in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

Lord, I admit I fear the unknown. I fear how others will act during this time of uncertainty, how long this will last, and not knowing what the world will look like for my children when this is over. Father, calm my heart. Help me to trust You. Please keep my children and grandchildren safe from this virus. Please allow me to stay healthy so that I can take care of them. Help me to rest at night, so that I have energy and clarity of mind. Keep me focused on You, so that I can fill my children and grandchildren with encouragement and not panic. Help us to not grow weary of one another while we're home together for who knows how long. Show me how to make the most of this time and disciple my children and grandchildren at the family altar with Your Word, prayer and faith in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FOR THE NEWLY UNEMPLOYED

Father God, You are our Provider and Refuge. Everything we have comes from You. But right now I feel like everything is being taken from me. I've been laid off from work, and if I can't make money, how will we pay our bills? How will I feed my family? I'm usually the strong one, but even I feel anxiety now. Please be with us. Please help me to point my family to You, even though I feel so lost and confused. Help me to demonstrate trust in You to my family. Give me the discipline to lead my family in worship at our family altar since we can't gather with our church family. Give me peace. Use this time to help us learn new things about each other, about ourselves, and about You. I trust You. Help me to demonstrate that to my family so that they feel safe during this crazy time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Lord, my business was booming just a week ago, and now there are no customers walking through the door. I'm feeling the weight of having to make decisions that will affect my employees. I may have to lay off some of my workers. They all have families and bills to pay. I feel so helpless. Please give me wisdom and Your wise discernment as I make these tough decisions. Please give me compassion as I have these tough conversations with my employees. Help me to be an example to them, to show them that I trust You to provide for us even in these dark times. I don't know what the future will look like, but I believe it to be true that You do - and You have a plan to bless. Father, give us courage as we face uncertainties and above all, I pray I glorify You in my response to this crisis. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS AND FIRST RESPONDERS

Father, I'm exhausted. There are so many people relying on me, and I'm not sure I can be stretched any thinner. I honestly didn't know I could keep going on such little sleep, so I give You praise for keeping me going! Please, Lord, keep me safe. Keep me healthy so that I can continue caring for the sick. I ask that You protect all the healthcare workers, first responders and all those who are serving as Your agents of mercy and grace. We need them to be healthy and available. I know that You are the Great Physician. You are the Healer and Ever-Present Help. I ask that You would put Your healing hand on our patients. I ask that You would work through us to give them the best care possible. Give us strength when we are weak, endurance to push through the long hours, and tongues that offer hope and compassion to these people who are sick and scared. Some of our patients won't survive this virus. Lord, don't let us become numb. Allow us to mourn with those who mourn, but also give us the strength to keep going, to keep working. Give us opportunities to share the hope that is found only in You. Help us not to be afraid. Remind us to praise You in this storm. Thank You for Your resurrection and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WE PRAY FOR OUR PASTORS AND CHURCH LEADERS

Father God, this virus is presenting new challenges every day. The emotions and attitudes of those in our church family are varied. Some are more afraid than others, some are more prone to anxiety than others, some run towards danger with no thought of the consequences. Lord, as a church leader, give me wisdom as I talk with and encourage your people. Give me the clarity to see the needs of the people. Please allow your Spirit to guide me and to speak through me as I offer hope and point them to you. Show me ways to keep our body connected during this time of social distancing. I praise you that we live in a time with technology that allows us to stay connected, yet I know many of our members still feel isolated and alone. Lord, give us eyes to see the needs. I ask that you equip your people to offer hope during this time, not panic. I pray that you would use your church to advance your kingdom, to be examples of your great love and to be ready to offer an explanation for the hope we have in you. Remind us that You hear all the prayers, You see all the needs, and You are a Provider. Lord, as we face these uncertain times, use this time to grow us in our faith and understanding of You. Remind us that we should live our lives ready to meet You at our appointed time and while we fear the unknown, we have assurance of salvation. We praise You, Lord, for Your goodness, Your mercy, and Your love. We know the COVID-19 outbreak did not surprise You. We know You are sovereign, even over this. Let that truth give us comfort, and may You give us opportunities to share that comfort with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.