

The
Coronavirus is
everywhere,
but
WHERE IS GOD?

I suppose that most people – rich or poor, master or servant – are under stress of one type or another because of the coronavirus. (If you are not one of them, you must qualify as a rare breed.)

Different persons have different approaches to stress. It would not be surprising to hear the question being

screamed out: WHERE IS GOD who is known to be loving, caring, faithful, almighty ...?

In fact, this question has been heard for the umpteenth time through all the great disasters in human history, including many mentioned in the Bible, and through any number of incidents of great personal suffering. Scrutinizing the motivation for such a question, one cannot help but feel that at the root of it is man's fear of suffering and fear of death.

In suffering or death, does blame lie at the feet of God?

The Bible tells us: *"God did not choose us to suffer his anger, but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us in order that we might live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes." (1 Thess. 5:9-10)*

God's Word focuses our attention on life and death not merely of this world but also of eternity together with Christ "whether we are alive or dead [in this world] when he comes."

"My thoughts," says the Lord, "are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours." (Isa 55:8)

Asking where God is in times of suffering is putting a question mark on faith. Being unable to think the way God thinks, we subconsciously set aside our faith and weigh ourselves down with our own rationalisation. If we truly walk in the realm of faith and not by appearance (2 Cor 5:7), our life would be filled with confidence as we say to God, *"For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth" (Ps 71:5)* – even if we cannot fully grasp God's purpose for the events according to His sovereign will.

As the scripture says, *"Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?" (Rom 11:34)*

Surely, we cannot be presumptuous to claim that we know the mind of the Lord and that we are qualified to tell Him what He should do about the coronavirus. Nevertheless, by what we know about sufferings and death as scripture reveals, we can lean on our faith and fill our minds with hope, even in hard times:

- **Inevitability of suffering** – *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 5:3–5)*
- **About life eternal** – *"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order*

that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (Eph 1:11)

Apart from fear of suffering and fear of death, is there anything called “helpful fear” or “helpful anxiety”?

Let’s say you have fear of getting into trouble with the law during the Circuit Breaker period and getting fined \$300. If this puts you on a cautious state of alert not to be forgetful about wearing a mask and not to be reckless against safe-distancing measures, it has the effect of keeping you and other people safe from the attacks of the coronavirus. Would you call this “helpful fear”?

Anxiety can exist at many levels. It needs not always be seen negatively. In fact, [a dose of eustress may be a much-needed prescription for some people](#) who are prone to exposing themselves to bad consequences because they simply are stress-free to “*bochap*” extreme – “couldn’t care less” come what may!

[“Eustress” is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a positive form of stress having a beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance, and emotional well-being.”](#)

Looking into the Bible, we can glean instructions on what to fear and what not to fear:

- Fear the LORD, for it is the beginning of knowledge ... (Prov 1:7)
- Do not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day. (Ps 91:5)
- Fear as a deterrent, to avoid evil or wrongdoing (Jn 3:20-21; Rom 13:4)
- Fear of the future – Do not be afraid what is going to happen. (Ac 27:24)
- Etc.

Clearly, there are positive fears (commendable) and negative fears (to be banished).

The million-dollar question now as we face a global crisis is: Do we have to fear the terror of the coronavirus and doubt that God is in control of everything that happens according to His sovereign purpose?

Yes, it is ok to have positive fear – to be awakened to the dangers out there and hence motivated to take the necessary actions in the interest of ourselves and our neighbours.

No, it is not ok to have negative fear and doubt God's presence during the crisis.

Crisis time is an opportunity for us to put aside negative fear and let our faith stand out:

“Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.” (Ps 23:4)

“Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” (Prov 3:25-26)

The MSG bible translation says, **“No need to panic over alarms or surprises, or predictions that doomsday's just around the corner, Because God will be right there with you; he'll keep you safe and sound.”**

It is certainly not right for people to make predictions. Let us not add to the innumerable failed predictions from doomsday “experts” in the past.

Some people may wax eloquent about the purpose of the pandemic, that it is an act of God to punish man for his sin plus some other reasons. If we agree about the inscrutability of God, then we are prepared to have no complete clear-cut answer about His will in the pandemic. Nevertheless, we do recognize that it takes darkness for man to be aware of light.

The darkness of the pandemic has brought about brighter skies with drastically reduced air pollution due to the lockdown of the world. The coronavirus has shone a light to bring into stark relief the darkness of human hubris in a thousand and one ways. Hopefully, intelligent people realise two things by their bright “fisheye” vision of hindsight:

- 1) The great foresight they often boasted was but a dark vision tunnel that threw askew their vanity schemes and projects of greed and arrogance.
- 2) *“Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word. We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it.” (Prov 16:1, 9 MSG)*

Is it only through suffering that wisdom rises above intellect?

Stress is not absent in me. Nevertheless, I know that:

God is neither silent nor absent in this pandemic.

Suffering births a compassion and flexibility we wouldn't otherwise have. Out of that shredding of our soul and reshaping of our view of God, He creates something new.

NGINA OTIENDE

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." – Proverbs 12:25

"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy." – Psalm 94:19

John Lee