

COPING WITH CORONAVIRUS

Dear Friends,

Who would have thought we would have been in this situation a few weeks ago? I appreciate only too well how many of you are feeling and I wanted to share some thoughts with you. We are in this together as a community so if we can help in any way whether it be a request for prayer, a chat or something practical please email me at community@holmergreenbaptist.org.uk. (In confidence)

Coping with self-isolation

If you live alone, self-isolation is likely to be particularly difficult. As well as feeling lonely, you may find that the days seem endless without a trip to the shops to break up the day or a trip out with friends to look forward to. You may find it helpful to **divide the day** up into sections. Things to include might be time with God, exercise, phone calls, letter writing, gardening, watching tv or reading. **Exercise** will help lift your mood as well as keeping you fit. If you have access to **outdoor space** this can also lift your mood. Take a walk around the garden or do some tidying up. Take comfort in the fact that nature is continuing as normal, with spring plants growing and birds nesting.

If there is a particular time of day when you feel low, you might be able to **save something pleasurable** for that time. This could be your opportunity to re-read a favourite book or sort through old photos. Use your time to look to God. You might like to try keeping a journal, making note of what you feel God is saying to you.

Dealing with anxiety

If you find that you are constantly **worrying**, turn your worries into **prayer** looking to God for His strength and comfort. Whenever you feel a concern creeping in, pause and **hand it over to God**, thanking Him that He is in control. Some of the verses below may help you with this.

FAITH AND CORONAVIRUS

This is the first time in our lifetimes that we have seen a global pandemic with such far-reaching consequences. Normal life is on hold. Church services, meetings, groups and activities are all suspended indefinitely and our local and national businesses are all under great strain. Whether or not we or any of our loved ones contract the virus, all of us will be impacted by the unprecedented restrictions on social contact, none more so than the over-70s.

Bringing our fears to God

Many older people are particularly vulnerable to the illness due to pre-existing conditions, and anxiety is a natural reaction. But rather than worrying and being anxious, Jesus calls us to respond with prayer and faith: **“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”** (Matthew 6:27) **“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”** (2 Timothy 1:7) Paul’s words remind us not to cower in the face of a threat, nor to panic. Through faith we can act with the power, love, and self-discipline that comes from God.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Let us resolve to pray throughout the duration of the coronavirus outbreak. Situations like this can cause fear and anxiety, but Paul’s words remind us that, in every situation, as we pray, we are able to reconnect to God’s peace. I am lighting a candle every evening at 7pm and placing it in my front window and spending time praying. It has been so encouraging to see my neighbours doing the same.

Anxiety and uncertainty lead people to actions which impact negatively on others. We are seeing empty supermarket shelves, people stockpiling rice and pasta, and fighting over toilet rolls. Prepare, but don’t panic. Let us always keep in mind Jesus’ command to **“love your neighbour as yourself”** (Mark 12:31) and **“to do unto others as you would have them do unto you”** (Luke 6:31). Consider how you might show kindness to neighbours and to others shut in at home

at this time, even if you are confined at home yourself. If you have a supermarket delivery, could you add any items for a neighbour?

If you have access to the internet, do use the resources available on our website. During the time you would normally have spent at a service, do take the opportunity to listen to the on-line sermon, listen to a selection of songs and hymns and use the prayer guide. Although we cannot meet together physically, we can still pray and worship as one body. You are very welcome to join us for our online service at 10:45am each Sunday.

The BBC produces various religious programmes and services. Radio 4 offers a Daily Service at 9.45am throughout the week on 198 kHz long wave and Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Sundays. On television, Songs of Praise is shown each Sunday, usually at 1.15pm on BBC1. Revelation TV on Freesat channel 692, Freeview HD channel 264, Sky channel 581, and is also available worldwide on the internet. On a Sunday morning from 10.30am . 12 noon they have a lovely programme called Church Without Walls, which ends in communion, and is really lovely for the housebound.

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8) Never in our lives have we been told so often to wash our hands. James is of course talking about cleansing ourselves from sin rather than the coronavirus. But perhaps for each of us, this period of social isolation is an opportunity to take time to examine our own lives, and to draw closer to God. Why not resolve to use this time of isolation to good purpose: to spend more time in prayer, in reading God’s Word, and reflecting on your priorities during this period when your normal activities have been suspended.

Ideas for prayer.

Pray for the world’s political leaders as they seek to implement strategies that will slow the rate of transmission of coronavirus, and for the scientific and medical community to discover, develop, and deploy a strategy to combat this crisis. Pray for all who are in authority and particularly for church leaders during this period. Pray for everyone who is unwell, and for those who are bereaved as a result of the virus. Pray for wisdom, strength, and endurance for our NHS and healthcare staff and others on the frontline, and also for those working behind the scenes. Pray for those struggling with loneliness and mental health difficulties during this time of social isolation. Pray for those who can no longer visit family members in nursing homes due to visiting restrictions. Pray that this time will prove to be a spiritual wake up call for our nation. Look out for the most vulnerable, and stay connected as much as you can. Love courageously and be like Jesus to those around you.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

Your Pastor and friend

Anthony Smith

Holmer Green Baptist Church