

West Valley Church
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For the Week of 3/29/20

As you can tell, since the “stay at home” order, we are now, like all of us, working from home. We’ve been at this for three weeks now, and it seems like every time we record a message, the restrictions get tighter. If this pattern keeps up, you will be watching this alone in a closet somewhere!

I’ve been praying for you, our West Valley Church family, and for our community, and of course for our nation and the world. As I mentioned last week, I’ve been asking God to protect you and keep you healthy. I’ve been asking God to work in your heart and mind, so that you don’t give in to the anxiety and fear and panic around you. I’ve been asking God’s Spirit to draw you into more deep, unhurried time in His presence and with your families.

I’ve been asking God to help us as a church to maintain our unity in Christ, that we would be strongly united in spirit even though we are physically apart. I’ve been praying that, at the very least, we will emerge from this with a much deeper appreciation of the need for and the value of meeting together regularly for worship. I’m praying for a revival in worship attendance when this is over, which I pray will be soon. I want you to know that, as your leaders, we are constantly monitoring the situation and making the best decisions we can, in ways that will ensure the safety of all of our West Valley Church family, from the youngest to the oldest of us.

So far in these messages, we’ve looked at a passage from 2 Timothy 1:7, reminding us that we don’t have to be afraid, but instead we can rely on the Holy Spirit’s power and love and His help with common sense in how we think about these times. Then last week we looked at 1 Peter 1:1-12, and we were reminded of the incredible grace that we have from God in Christ, allowing us to not simply endure this time, but to actually grow in our faith and love *because of* this time.

Now I want us to consider how we think about this situation we are in. Our approach to this time will in many ways reflect our understanding of God and his nature. What we think of God will either cause us to give in to fear or discouragement or anger, or to grow even closer to God and more like Christ. Even though all of us are experiencing some level of grief in this, and rightly so, we want to make sure we have a good understanding of God and his love for us.

One of Jesus’ expressed reasons for being born among us was to show us who God is. He even said:

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9, niv)

Jesus revealed to us God’s character and then, through his life, death, and resurrection, he gave us the way to be forgiven of our sins and know the freedom that comes from being a child of God. The God that Jesus revealed can be our Father. So when we read about Jesus in the Gospels and all the things he did, we are constantly being shown things about God. They are, after all, One and the Same. With this in mind, look at the teaching that Jesus gave when he healed the man who had been born blind. The disciples asked whose fault it was that the man

was blind; was it because he sinned, or because his parents sinned? Jesus' response is quite telling; he said:

““It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.” (John 9:3, nlt)

So what does that mean? That means first of all that God doesn't cause these things to happen. God does not cause evil.

Scripture says that when God finished His creation, He saw everything and declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). There are many Scriptures that affirm that God is not the author of evil:

"God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13)

"God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)

"God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33)

—and if that's true, He cannot in any way be the author of evil. Bad things happen this side of heaven, and there is no promise in Scripture that says any of us are exempt from it. The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote:

“Sometimes something useless happens on earth. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people.” (Ecclesiastes 8:14, ncv)

Bad things are going to happen. But, Jesus said, God's power can be revealed in our lives in the midst of bad things.

So, while God doesn't cause pandemics, neither is he distant or aloof; he is very, very close to you in these times. Psalm 34:18 says:

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” (Psalm 34:18, nlt)

God is very near you in this time; this virus cannot separate you from his love for you! Romans 8:38-39 says:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39, niv)

So God doesn't cause this, but he is near to you in this. And, he can heal you; you can pray for healing for yourself and your loved ones who are sick. Psalm 147 says:

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3, niv)

And, as you know, there are many examples in the Gospels of Jesus healing people. But at the same time we have to notice that, while Jesus healed people, he did not heal *all* people. For all the people that Jesus healed, there were many, many more who were not. So we must naturally conclude then that, while Jesus can heal, he doesn't always heal in the way we want him to. When you read the Gospel of John, one thing you'll notice is that he refers to Jesus' supernatural healings and miracles as “signs.” This means that the healing is not the end result

Jesus was after; it was merely to point us to something, like a sign does. So don't get stuck just hoping for a healing; don't mistake the supernatural for the sign. The point is that being healed is not the biggest thing; the biggest thing is that Jesus is your savior, that God is your father, that he is with you and strengthening you in all things, and that one day ALL sickness will be gone.

We are not promised deliverance from suffering every time. **We are promised deliverance *through suffering until one day we will be delivered from suffering.***

But here's the thing: God wants to work in you and through you in the midst of sickness. Jesus said that the man's blindness became an opportunity for God to be glorified. This virus is an opportunity for God to be glorified – through YOU. The way that you remain at peace, the way that you are growing in your faith in this time, and the way you care for others means God can be glorified through you. More often than not, when God heals, he does it through you. That's right – you. Because Jesus is alive and living in you, he heals through you. And healing doesn't always come *after* sickness; sometimes healing comes *before* sickness. God heals us before we even know we needed to be healed. Listen: by you staying at home and practicing social distancing through this time means that God is providing healing *before* anyone gets sick. If you were out and about, not caring about the stay at home rule, then you'd be exposing yourself to what could be a very serious if not fatal sickness, and you'd be exposing others to that same serious or fatal sickness. God is healing people *before* they are sick, through you, by your actions.

God didn't cause this virus; God is not capable of creating evil and suffering; unfortunately, we are the guilty ones. We are capable of evil. We live in a world that once was perfect until the human race sinned. We opened the door to sin and selfishness, bringing all kinds of sickness into this world. But God promises to be with us and will never stop loving us. God does sometimes bring miraculous healing, but we don't want to miss the sign for the supernatural; God doesn't heal everyone every time, at least not this side of heaven. But he will give us power, patience, and strength that will deliver us through suffering until one day we are delivered from suffering, in heaven. But every day you and I have the opportunity to bring glory to God by living in healing and redemptive ways - even if it means staying at home.

So the next time you are binge watching Netflix, or in my case, re-watching every episode of Psych, you don't have to feel guilty – you are actually healing people before they get sick! Better yet, instead of binge-watching TV, let's draw closer to God and to our family, until we can all join back together again as God's family, to praise him in worship on Sundays!