

## **What the Church Needs to Know to Reduce Psychological Harm during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:7 KJV*

Even though, we are saved, sanctified, filled with the Holy Ghost, have Jesus on our side, and are running for our lives, COVID-19 has stirred up feelings, emotions, doubts, and fears that we have never had before. Daily statistics inform us that the number of positive cases of COVID-19 are increasing, along with the number of deaths, though, in spite of the increase, many people are recovering, both young and old. Yet, what our ears tend to hear and what our minds seem to remember most are the staggering statistics of over a million cases worldwide and over 60,000+ deaths. We focus even more on the cases and deaths in our local cities, counties, and states. That's when, if we are not careful and prayerful, panic will set in, as we realize that this is not the flu, this is a vicious virus, that some health workers refer to as "the beast." So, what do we do and how do we cope?

Due to mass communication mediums, everyone now knows to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds, cough and sneeze into their elbows or tissues, avoid touching their face, stay at least six feet from others, self-quarantine when feeling sick, and to stay home as much as possible. Just this week, we have been told to wear masks when going out for essentials, because data is now showing that many people are exhibiting no symptoms, yet they are carriers of the virus and can unknowingly infect others. Therefore, these are very wise instructions to maintain our physical health, but what about our mental health and the psychological impact of this global pandemic. The impact is not just limited to the un-churched world or those who do not yet know Jesus as their savior, it includes the body of Christ- the saints of God. How do we protect ourselves from being overtaken and even destroyed by the spirit of panic that is gripping our world?

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, but its mental health consequences are becoming clear. Current research has found depression and anxiety are on the increase. This increase can place many people at risk for self-harm, harm to others, domestic violence, elder and child abuse, as we navigate maintaining sanity when the entire family must "stay at home." Many people have been furloughed or terminated and have no other means of support for themselves and their families. They are having to file for unemployment or go to food banks or other charities, just to survive. Others have lost loved ones to this virus or other illnesses and can't give them proper funerals, due to physical distancing that is mandated. This has exacerbated the grief and pain of the initial loss and has prevented proper closure. In order to cope, for some of us, this may mean that we will need to speak with a licensed mental health

professional for the first time in our lives. If we are extremely anxious or depressed, we may need to be evaluated medically for support through medication in order to maintain our balance. Because this virus is unprecedented, our response also must be unprecedented and without prejudice, as we go through these uncharted waters.

**Here are some practical suggestions to enable us to maintain mental health wellness during this crisis. This list of suggestions is not meant to be exhaustive.**

- **Self-care** is of utmost importance- Keep to a daily routine, continue personal grooming and dress each day. Staying in our night clothes can suggest a “sick model.” Dress in bright colors. That can be a mood elevator. Find your “security blanket.” It may be an object, a favorite inspirational book, the bible, a favorite chair or couch. Find that place or thing that makes you feel safe and spend time with it every day. Make sure your children have one, too.
- Try to get some **fresh air** or at least allow the sun to shine on your face each day. Light has a way of making us feel better. And Jesus is the light of the world. Walk with proper distance early in the morning or the evening on less traveled streets or roads to avoid crowds. Avoid parks, too many people have the same idea. Opening windows and letting the fresh air in is also quite effective for avoiding that “cooped up” feeling.
- **Exercise**-Our bodies were created to move. Even with current restrictions, we can stretch, walk, or jog around the block, walk up and down our stairs or use exercise equipment, if we have it at home, to stay fit.
- **Maintain social connection.** This is a must to avoid feelings of isolation. Reach out to others at least once daily for thirty minutes at a minimum. Try to do FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, phone calls, texting—connect with other people to seek and provide support. Spend time with your prayer partner. Don’t forget to do this for your children as well. Set up virtual playdates with friends regularly via FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Kids, Zoom, etc.—your kids miss their friends, too!
- **Stay hydrated and eat well.** Some of us will eat more- stress eating and some will eat less. Some may even forget to eat. Too much weight gain or too much weight loss needs to be medically addressed. Stress can make us do these things which are not healthy. Drink plenty of water and do your best to eat healthy meals and snacks.
- **Enjoy your family.** Eat together, have family discussions, reminisce, play games, go through old photos and scrapbooks, sing and play instruments and listen to each other. This is an unintended gift of the virus-time together with our immediate families.

- **Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.** A lot of “cooped up” time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace and patience.
- **Expect behavioral issues in children**, i.e. nightmares, fears, testing limits, and meltdowns. Be gentle with them. Be light with consequences. Their lives have been disrupted, too.
- **Remember to laugh.** Find some humor in all of this. “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones”, Proverbs 17:22 KJV
- **Notice the good in the world**, the doctors, nurses, hospital staff, volunteers, researchers, philanthropists, and countless unsung heroes. People are putting their lives on the line to save others. Pray unselfish prayers for them and their families. Miracles are still happening every day.
- **Limit social media and news media exposure.** Because it changes minute to minute, find a few trusted sources that you can check in with consistently and limit it to a few times a day, being careful not to watch the news close to bedtime. This could disturb your sleep. Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot from children—they see and hear everything and can become very frightened by what they hear.
- **Help others.** Find ways, big and small, to offer support. Be concerned about those in our churches and immediate communities who are most vulnerable. As the hymnwriter said, “If I can help somebody along the way, then my living will not be in vain.’
- **Find something you can control.** In moments of big uncertainty, try to control your little corner of the world. Do a long overdue household project. Such actions help to anchor and ground us when the world feels chaotic. Most of all, remember that God has it all in control. This is not a surprise to Him. He knew it was coming and allowed this pandemic. Rest on His promises and rest in His word.
- **Remind yourself daily that this is temporary.** It seems, in the midst of this pandemic, that it will never end. But It had a beginning and it will have an end. The Lord is our Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.
- **Search for the lesson of this global crisis.** The Lord is speaking. Pray that the Lord will give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what the spirit is saying to the church. Ask the hard questions of yourself, your church, your ministry, and your community. Be open to new learning, insights, and divine revelation that will come out of this and may only come because of this. Know that there will be glory after this. There will be a greater testimony, a greater anointing, and a greater challenge.

Finally, **don't forget to pray, read the word, and remember, Philippians 4:8 KJV,**  
"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just,  
whosoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of a  
good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things."

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April 6, 2020