

Healing from the Distress of the COVID-19 Crisis

Pilot edition. March 2020

Background

This lesson is designed to help you:

- Better understand the COVID-19 disease
- Explore the effects of COVID-19 on people
- Reflect on God’s love and care in the midst of this crisis
- Learn how to help yourselves and others heal from the trauma of COVID-19

This lesson can be used two ways. If you do it as a standalone lesson, you can continue on with the booklet *Beyond Disaster: A Survivor’s Guide for Spiritual First Aid* to go further in the healing process. You can also use this lesson with a group that is going through *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*.

The lesson is best used in small groups where you can discuss the reflection questions and do the exercises together. If you use it on your own, journal about the questions and exercises.

It is most effective if you first discuss the reflection questions before looking at the information that follows. This may help you or the group understand your own feelings without pressure to find a “correct” answer.

In groups, you can do the whole lesson in one meeting of around 1½–2 hours. You can also spread the lesson out over a few shorter meetings. In this case, start each meeting with a review: What does the group remember from the last session? Have they had any reflections or experiences they would like to share?

Section Title	Minimum time needed
Section 1: Story	15 min
Section 2: What is COVID-19?	15 min
Section 3: How are people affected by this new virus?	25 min
Section 4: Remembering God’s love in times of distress	15 min
Section 5: How can we help ourselves heal?	20 min
Section 6: Closing	10 min

1. When will this end?

“You mean everything at church is cancelled? How can that happen?” John had just come back from a business trip and was sitting down to supper with his wife, Anne.

She replied, “Well, have you been watching the news while you were away?”

“Yes, of course. We have all been discussing the coronavirus and the effects it will have on our business, but I didn’t really think things were as serious as that. We have mainly been worried about the impact it is having already on people who are paid by the hour.”

“Yes,” said Anne. “You know Joe at church who plays the double bass? I met him outside today and he said that he is really worried about finances. With all the concerts cancelled, how is he going to pay his rent? Even self-isolating is hard for him because he doesn't have money to buy extra food. He looked a bit sick to me, but he won't admit it and go home, as he has a chance to make some money giving lessons to children.”

The next day John and Anne were shocked to hear that an elderly aunt of John's had been taken into hospital with the virus. Before they were able to phone her, they heard she had died from complications caused by her asthma. Over the next few days as John helped plan her funeral, he realized this would be a very different situation than normal. Only a few immediate relatives would be able to be present at her funeral due to the quarantine regulations. Then he learned that the funeral would have to be delayed because there was a such long waiting list for the place they planned to hold the funeral. John had had a close relationship with his aunt, and now there were so many other issues to think about that he felt unable to grieve her loss.

Anne had been told not to come to work since one of the people at her workplace had been diagnosed with the virus. For a few days Anne enjoyed the freedom to catch up on household jobs she had needed to do for many months, but soon she began to feel restless and depressed. “When will life come back to normal?” she moaned to John. As the weeks went on, she felt more and more depressed and spent a lot of time staring into space. She was wondering how God could allow this to happen. She asked herself how she could still believe that God loves us and cares for us.

John and Anne's church was doing its best to keep track of their members. They worked through the leaders of the house groups to see how people were getting on. Soon John and Anne's house group leader became aware of Anne's state of mind and looked for ways to help her and others. The house group already had an online group. Now they arranged to talk virtually once a week and do a Bible study together. Other members told Anne how they were helped by taking a good brisk walk each day, whatever the weather! Their church arranged to live-stream their Sunday services. Gradually Anne got used to the new realities, felt again that God did care what happened, and found ways of being usefully occupied.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How were John, Anne, and Joe affected by the COVID-19 virus?
2. How did John and Anne's church help the house groups?
3. What is difficult about this story for you?

2. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, a new type of coronavirus. Some other members of the coronavirus family that you might know are the common cold and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). This group of viruses are often connected with the crossover of animal viruses to humans. The new virus has caused a pandemic; it is not only a local problem but is spreading throughout the world. It is extremely contagious and can lead to death.

QUIZ

Read the following statements and write down whether you think the statement is true or false. Then go over the correct answers that are at the end of the lesson. See how many answers you know.

1. The main symptoms of COVID-19 disease are fever, a dry cough, and breathing problems.
2. You can catch COVID-19 from someone who does not have any symptoms.
3. Young people do not need to worry about being infected by the virus.
4. Everyone who catches COVID-19 dies from it.
5. The only way to be completely sure you are not infected by the virus is to isolate yourself from others.
6. Being hospitalized is the only way to heal from this disease.
7. You should not hug your children any more to avoid getting the virus.
8. Wearing a face mask is the best way to keep from being infected by the virus.
9. If quarantined, a strong Christian will rejoice without ceasing and will always be content.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do people in your community say about COVID-19?
2. How does this compare to what you have just learned?

3. How are people affected by this new virus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do people feel helpless during this COVID-19 virus crisis?
2. What kinds of fears does COVID-19 bring out in people?
3. What kinds of losses do people experience with COVID-19?
4. What are the effects of isolating yourself from other people?

Share feedback and then add anything relevant from the list below that has not already been mentioned:

1. *Helplessness:* Loss of agency or voice, loss of control over one's life. Being a victim of something unexpected and beyond one's control. The world does not make sense. Not knowing who or what to believe.
2. *Fears:* People may fear death, or change, or loss of job, home, way of life, or sense of purpose. People who test positive for the virus or those who are from groups with high infection rates may fear being stigmatized by others. People may fear being unable to get medical care for themselves or their loved ones. They may fear overreacting or under-reacting.
3. *Loss:* People may lose jobs, income, homes, contact with loved ones. People they know and love may die, with no opportunity for farewells or funerals. Events they had been looking forward to may be canceled. They lose the predictable rhythm of life.
4. *Isolation:* People may feel depressed, lonely, worried, angry, suicidal, trapped, or bored. Those who have to stay at home with family members in close quarters may feel crowded or harassed. These emotions may take all their energy and leave them feeling tired all the time. Some of these feelings may continue long after the quarantine is over.

Everyone will feel stress during this time. People who are overwhelmed by their feelings of helplessness, fear, loss, and the effects of isolation may feel traumatized. Do not be surprised if the pain of other things you experienced in the past returns at this time.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What is the most difficult part of this situation for you?

4. Remembering God's love in times of distress

You can choose the exercise you prefer, or do both.

EXERCISE: WHERE IS GOD?

You reflected on the effects that COVID-19 may have on others and considered what the most difficult thing about this situation is for yourself. Now take some time to reflect about God in this crisis.

You will need blank paper and some markers.

1. Get quiet inside. Reflect on where you feel God has been in this crisis for you. What images come to mind?
2. Divide your paper in half. On one half, draw whatever comes to mind for you. Let the drawing happen without thinking about it too much. This is just to express how you feel, not a test of your ability to draw. You may find that God is completely absent: that's okay.
3. Read or listen to Romans 8:38–39 and take some time in silence to meditate on it:

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. On the other half of your paper, draw where you feel God is now.
5. Reflect on your two drawings. Share with others if you are comfortable doing so, or journal your reflections.

EXERCISE: LIVE PICTURE

You need at least one other person to do this exercise.

1. Read or listen to Romans 8:38–39 and take some time in silence, letting the words sink in:

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. In small groups or in pairs, decide which part of the passage is most meaningful to you. Take about 10 minutes and create a scene with your bodies that gives a snapshot of that part of the passage.

3. Perform your live picture for the others, or have someone take a photo or video of it. Hold the pose for at least 30 seconds.
4. Discuss these questions:
 - a. Did anything in the passage become clearer to you through this exercise? Explain.
 - b. Did anything in this passage give you comfort or hope? Explain.

5. How can we heal from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is helping you cope with this situation?
2. What is hindering you from coping with this situation?

Share feedback and then add anything relevant from the lists below that has not already been mentioned.

For emotions:

- Recognize that this is a traumatic situation and accept your feelings as normal. By paying attention to what they are telling you, you can respond better.
- Make a list of your losses. It is normal to feel sad when we have losses.
- Learn ways to calm your strong emotions through breathing slowly and deeply, imagining scenes that help you feel calm, and so forth.
- Pay attention to where you feel stress in your body. Try to relax any parts of your body that feel tense.
- Talk about your feelings with people who are safe and know how to listen. Listen to their stories.
- Tell God honestly how you feel.
- Rest in God's care for you.
- Encourage children and teens to express their feelings, in words or art or play, and listen to them.
- Find a reliable source of information about the disease, the dangers, and appropriate responses.

For isolation:

- Connect with others without having close physical contact: by phone, virtually, or in other creative ways.
- Share with others some Scripture passages that encourage or comfort you.
- Establish routines.
- Get exercise and fresh air, if possible. Rest regularly.
- Do something you enjoy.

- Help others, perhaps those who have been most affected by the virus.
- Find some meaningful activities.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What are one or two things you think would help you?

6. Closing

1. Get quiet inside and imagine you are carrying a container, like a backpack, jug, bowl, basket, or suitcase. What kind of container is it?
2. Think about the worries you are carrying. What are you worried about? Put each one in the container. You can do this in your imagination or by writing or drawing on paper. Feel the weight of the container.
3. Reflect on Jesus's words in Matthew 6:25–32:

“This is why I tell you: Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn't life worth more than food? And isn't the body worth more than clothes? Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?

“And why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. It is God who clothes the wild grass—grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have!

“So do not start worrying: ‘Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes?’ ... Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things.”

4. Lighten your load of worry by giving your container to God. Imagine or draw this process. How do you feel now?
5. Share your experience with others, as much as you feel comfortable.

Sing a song of encouragement together and pray for one another.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. True.
2. True. People can pass on the virus for two weeks before they show symptoms. Complete isolation may not be possible. Limiting contact with others helps to reduce the spread of the virus. Experts recommend staying three to six feet away from others.
3. False. Young people can catch the virus and pass it on to others, even if they are not seriously ill themselves. They need to be careful.
4. False. In the majority of cases, the symptoms are mild, like having a cold or the flu, or there may be no symptoms at all. However, older people (65 and over), people with heart disease, lung disease, breathing problems, or diabetes are at a higher risk of having a severe case. The reason so many people die from COVID-19 is that so many people catch it.
5. True. People can have the virus but have no symptoms. This is one reason it spreads so much.
6. False. Most people will recover with no to mild intervention. Serious cases usually need help from hospitals or clinics.
7. False. You still need to show affection to your children.
8. False. To avoid infection by the virus, wash your hands frequently with soap for at least 20 seconds each time; avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose; and distance yourself from others by at least six feet. A face mask will help you keep your hands away from your face and may reduce your risk of infection to some degree. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, a face mask will prevent you spreading the disease to others. Health workers who are exposed to many COVID-19 patients should wear high-quality masks and protective clothing. Follow the guidelines on the use of masks provided by your local officials.
9. False. Since we are created for community and we need order in our world, it is normal for people to experience many of the feelings of trauma and loss. This is not a sign of bad character or lack of faith.

Note for users: This lesson is designed for wide use. The Trauma Healing Institute also produces other programming designed for use in small groups with trained facilitators. For more information about trauma healing, visit the Trauma Healing Institute at TraumaHealingInstitute.org, or contact any member organization of the Trauma Healing Alliance.

We need feedback on this lesson. If you use this pilot version with a group, you are invited to send comments to info@traumahealinginstitute.org.