

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of March 15th - 21st

The following excerpt comes from an article written by Andy Crouch entitled: “Love in the Time of Coronavirus: A Guide for Christian Leaders”. Though intended for leaders, this is simply too good to keep to leaders alone. Wherever Crouch says “Christian leader”, just think “Christian”. The sentence works every time. Besides, right now, every faithful Christ follower is a leader in our community. People are watching. Study, discuss, and apply this document with your family and your community group. Let’s get to work!

At this extraordinary moment, local leaders have perhaps the greatest opportunity to shape culture in the United States that they have ever had. This is a guide for those of us who are Christian leaders at this moment.

1. *We need to change norms of social interaction literally overnight to minimize the transmission of the virus. I will outline below what I believe are the most important steps, based on the best public information about SARS-CoV-2 (the virus) and COVID-19 (the disease). These steps feel drastic. Crucially, implementing them early enough will require tremendous leadership because they will not initially seem necessary to most of the people we lead. When dealing with pandemics, the measures that will actually make a difference always need to be taken sooner than we think.*
 2. *We need to redirect social energy from anxiety and panic to love and preparation. This crisis presents an extraordinary opportunity to fortify small communities of love and care for our neighbors. That will only happen if we lead in a way that reduces fear, increases faith, and reorients all of us from self-protection to serving others.*
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1. What Is Happening?

- Everyone, anywhere in the continental United States, should assume that the virus is present in their community even if there have not yet been any reports of disease.
- COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, is considerably more deadly than ordinary flu, especially for vulnerable populations: the elderly and those with existing medical conditions.
- The disease can be mild in many people, even unnoticed. But this actually increases the risk to others, as “asymptomatic” carriers can transmit the virus to the highly vulnerable without realizing they are infectious.
- Therefore, there is a serious risk beyond the virus’s simple fatality rate: its potential to overwhelm our health-care system, leading to many more otherwise preventable deaths from COVID-19 and other causes.
- Without question we are in for extended financial turmoil and real-world economic pain.

2. What Should We Communicate?

“Just as important for moving the horizons of possibility are what we say, how we say it, and even how we appear to others as we say these things. The way we communicate will shape the choices others make, and how they approach their own decision-making.”

“This means that all of us have a primary responsibility as leaders, as far as it depends on us, to be well-rested, soaked in prayer and contemplation, and free of personal fear and anxiety. We need to start

and end each day as children of our heavenly Father, friends of Jesus, and grateful recipients of the Holy Spirit. We need to pray for genuine spiritual authority, rooted in the love that casts out fear, to guard and govern our lives as we lead, and trust that God will make up what is lacking in our own frail hearts, minds, and bodies.”

Out of this basic posture, he says, we can communicate specific messages.

The Most Harmful Messages from Christian Leaders Right Now

- We should not say, “Everything’s going to be fine,” or even, “You’re going to be okay.”
- We should not say to fearful people, “You’re overreacting.”

The Most Helpful Messages from Christian Leaders Right Now

- We should say, “Love is the reason we are changing our behavior.”
- We should say, “Prepare for trouble.”
- Above all we should say, “Do not be afraid.”

3. What Decisions Do We Need to Make?

“Simply put, anyone, anywhere in the United States, who has responsibility for any group of people needs to change the way those groups gather, immediately and drastically. The steps required would have been unthinkable even a few weeks ago. Now they are essential if we are to protect those vulnerable to COVID-19 and the health system that will need to care for them.”

- Gathering for worship should continue, perhaps after initial cancellations to allow time to put new protocols in place, but ideally in numbers less than 100 and with dramatic precautions that few people in the United States have ever seen.
- Other gatherings of more than 100 people scheduled less than four weeks away should be canceled immediately.
- Small groups can continue to meet and work together. But we must make significant modifications to the way we interact with one another in our homes and workplaces.

Some more specifics:

- Until it is clear that transmission of the virus has stopped and the curve has bent definitively in the other direction, the right choice is to cancel all public events, especially of more than 100 people, that are not worship of God in Word and Sacrament. Events scheduled for less than four weeks away should be canceled immediately.
- My informed judgment is that, provided no one is sick, and no one has reason to believe they have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2 and are within the 14-day window of potential infectious transmission, there is no strong epidemiological reason not to meet together for fellowship, encouragement, shared work, and celebration and recreation—as long as we dramatically change the way we interact with one another.
- Groups of less than ten people can meet together with minimal risk, provided that

- * no one present is sick or has any reason to think they have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2, shared surfaces are disinfected before and after the meeting
- * everyone washes their hands thoroughly (more than 20 seconds) upon arrival and upon returning to their home
- * food and drink are served individually
- * as much distance as possible is maintained between members of different households and their belongings.

4. What Can We Hope For?

- We have every reason to trust that this epidemic will pass.
- We can reasonably hope that the economic costs of this epidemic, though severe in the short run, will be limited in the way that past epidemics have been.

Penultimate hopes that should animate our leadership:

1. We have an unprecedented chance to act redemptively in the midst of crisis and fear.
2. We can reclaim the household as the fundamental unit of personhood, the place where we all are best known and cared for.
3. We may see the revival of genuine Christian faith and discipleship, and the renewal of the church of Jesus Christ in the United States.

<https://journal.praxislabs.org/love-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-26aaeb0396e3>

Sermon Notes for 3/15/20
Titus 1:9
“Elders on Mission, Part 4”:
An Elder’s Convictions

- **Our mission and vision demand biblical church leadership - and that means biblical eldership (vv.5-8)**

*Every single elder in our fellowship must not only possess godly character, but unshakable theological convictions (v.9a)

in order to...

1. _____ the body of Christ with the _____ of sound _____
 (v.9b; Ephesians 4:11-16)

2. _____ the body of Christ with the _____ of sound _____
 (v.9c; Romans 16:17-20)

Next Week: Titus 1:10-16 - “Wolves Amidst the Mission, Part 1”