



Thinking Clearly in the Midst of a Crisis

by Dr. Jim Garlow

March 20, 2020 “Coronavirus Response”

Like you, I have tried to keep informed regarding the Coronavirus, from the most trusted sources I know. Early on, I felt the hype exceeded the disease, and it may have. And I felt that some were being unnecessarily melodramatic. And perhaps they were. But as time has gone by, we have seen the sickness increase. (Yes, it may not be as bad as the flu in terms of deaths so far, but it is far more contagious than the flu. And unlike the flu, there is no vaccine.) Here are some ways to think as we process this event:

- **SERIOUS:** While all of us always took seriously the “wash your hands, don’t touch your face, cough or sneeze in your elbow” routine, we should all be taking the potential impact of this sickness seriously. Several things sobered me:
 - The private-public alliance that was presented in the Presidential press conference on Friday, March 13, was impressive. I was trying to think, “When have I ever seen anything like that.” I hadn’t. It reminded me of my reading about the massive private business/governmental partnership that was formed to accomplish the insurmountable Normandy Invasion on the coast of France on June 6, 1944, during WWII. Have we seen this much public-private sector cooperation since then? I don’t know. I don’t think so. Since then, headlines have read “Trump Invokes Wartime Authority,” and “Merkel: Biggest Challenge since WWII.” As I listened to the press conference and read the more recent headlines, I was sobered.
 - Newt Gingrich is not given to hyperbole and melodrama. I had the privilege of working close range with him right before and during his run for the presidency in 2012. On Friday, March 13, 2020, he wrote in Newsweek of the seriousness of the Coronavirus in Italy where he and his wife – now serving as the US Ambassador to the Vatican – now live. I read it. (Yes, I know this is not Italy, but) I was sobered.
 - On Sunday, March 15, a close friend connected with an Israeli expert on communicable diseases shared what he had learned. I was sobered.
 - Approximately 80 or so mega-church pastors and Christian leaders were on a phone call with the White House on Monday, March 16. I was sobered.
 - Bottom line: My concern – not fear, but concern – significantly heightened.
 - (Memes: I do, however, think the memes are creative and humorous. In all

this uncertainty, the humor is refreshing. I see no inconsistency between taking the illness seriously, but chuckling at our obsessions – with toilet paper, for example! – regarding the Coronavirus. Some of the memes are hilarious. I am glad to get some comic relief. We all need it.)

- **EXIGENCY:** You likely already know this word. If not, learn this word. It is pronounced ek-si-juh-see. What does it mean? A unprecedented situation which calls for highly unusual and abnormal responses. That is what we are in right now as a nation. It means that government, businesses, entertainment, schools, churches and homes all function differently. Radically different. This is an exigency.

- **ADJUSTMENTS:** While growing up, my father would often say, “Life is made up of adjustments.” He was right. Edwin Louis Cole often said, “There are only two ‘constants’ in life: God and change.” So thankful for God. Not so thankful for “change.”

- **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:** One should always be emergency prepared – always. Some are. Most aren’t. You may be. Or you might be one of those who is not. You need to be. Now. Food. Water. Other necessities. Enough to last a substantial time. And a small generator, if possible. This is also biblical. Joseph did it for Egypt in Genesis. The five virgins in Matthew 25 were rewarded for being prepared. By being prepared you can care for one another, as the Bible admonishes us. Will this calamity be over soon? Maybe. Maybe not. Be emergency prepared. There are companies that sell quality emergency preparedness items. Candidly, you should have purchased them some time ago. It is almost too late, but not entirely. If you don’t use the items now, you will have them in the next crisis. Being prepared is an act of responsibility to yourself, your family and your neighbors. A demonstration of love. And by the way, having is not hoarding. Don’t feel guilty for preparing for the unpredictable. Don’t let others “guilt” you. Repeating: having is not hoarding. While essential infrastructure that provides electricity, fuel for our cars and water is not being impacted, it is always wise to think through what you would do if those essential services were cut off.

- **QUARANTINE:** The concept of being quarantined is not new. It is biblical, having occurred 3,000 years ago. There are many biblical texts on this, including Leviticus 13:4, 36; 14:8. Be respectful of the call to stay separate from others.

- **LEADERSHIP:** Our President and his Coronavirus Task Force are giving exceptional leadership. It is encouraging that at least some bipartisanship

cooperation has been demonstrated. It is disappointing that some are still using the occasion to continue their political sniping.

- **GOVERNMENT:** Remember that word exigency mentioned above? Our government cannot function the same as usual. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt led the nation through the Great Depression (1929-1933) and the Dust Bowl (early 1930's), he invoked unusual powers. The same was true during WWII. He likely needed to do much of this to save the nation. (The unfortunate thing is that some of those powers were never revoked. They were legitimate for a short time, but once government gets control, it rarely gives it back.) Our nation has never faced something of this magnitude – that is, a total shutdown. And we are facing it at a time in which the entire world is experiencing the same threat. Expect things to be different. They will.

- **OUR RIGHTS:** Emphasizing what was said above, we are in a precarious place as a nation. To ignore the government mandated shutdowns now would be foolhardy. Disease would spread. It could be lethal. But, as noted above, what government takes, it rarely gives back. Once we get through this, we need to make certain that fundamental and constitutionally guaranteed rights are not taken from us ongoing. This is exactly what Thomas Jefferson wrote about in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist on January 1, 1802. And this is what the Bill of Rights is supposed to protect (including such things as the right to assemble and government making no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion). I have confidence in our current President regarding this matter, that is, that basic rights will be honored once again. I do not have confidence in those that advocate for “more government,” thus more control. Those who eagerly desire to expand government’s reach will undoubtedly view this as the crisis for which they have been waiting. And I most assuredly do not have confidence in the globalists – waiting in the wings to pounce – on this matter. (Just in case you are one of those who thinks that the words “globalists” and “deep state” are figments of the imagination in the minds of conspiracy theorists, you might want to do some careful research.) Bottom line, we are vulnerable as a nation to losing our Constitutional rights.

- **ECONOMICS:** The Bible clearly affirms “free enterprise” or a “free market” within the perimeters of a Judeo-Christian framework. (Scripture does not affirm socialism, but rather supports properly founded capitalism. See *The Poverty of Nations* by Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, or *For the Least of These* by Anne R. Bradley and Art Lindsley or *Money, Greed and God* by Jay Richards.) But there are economic exigencies. (There’s that word again.) One of the unusual economic moments in New Testament times is found in Acts 2:44, when everyone shared everything in common. (This was not forced. It

was not governmentally driven socialism. And the sharing provided first for the “household of faith” – that is, other believers. Galatians 6:10). Be aware that we are in a most unusual season. Even our government will be temporarily taking unusual economic steps. It is totally consistent to be a “small government advocate” and one who wants the national debt to be reduced, but at the same time, one who, given the crisis, knows that some unprecedented, temporary steps must be taken. (The key, however, is to remember that once this present danger is past, we return to sane, time-tested and biblically-sound, ongoing economic policies. We will need a rollback of some of the emergency measures.)

- **THE PAUSE:** I am not making claims theologically about this “pestilence,” but the entire world has been put on pause. What is God up to in this moment? That is the most important question to ask right now.

- **THE CHURCH:** Some church buildings closed last Sunday. Others remained open. I read on Facebook that pastors were criticized for their decisions. People need to stop it. Pastors – at least the ones I know – love their people. They try to hear from God. Some felt they should close the building to protect people’s health. Others felt – based on what they knew at that point – that it was a “faith issue” and stayed open. Do not criticize any pastor – for whatever decision he/she made. Staying open was not presumptive and closing was not a lack of faith. Stop the criticism. Expend the energy that you have by praying for your pastor. Realistically the church was not “closed.” Only a building was closed. You – we, all of us – are the church. We are always “open.”

- **VICTORY:** Churches who were open had great services. Churches that closed used technology to reach more people than they ordinarily could. One of my friends had 1.1 million people watching! Another had 250,000! Many responded to the call of salvation. The Bible-believing churches across America – whether buildings were open or closed – were truly the church last Sunday. It was remarkable.

- **IDOLS:** Sports is good, but obsession with it is not. Sports – along with many other things – has become an idol. Hollywood is all about idols. Business can become an idol. Alcohol is an idol for many. Obsession with pleasure has become an idol. The nation’s finest universities – and the education one receives there – have become idols. Possessing “things” is an idol for many, but these “things” can’t save you now. Even pride in our mega-church worship services can become an idol if we are not careful. (I like the bands, smoke machines and the lights, but beware, as this can become an idol.) Name the idol. It has come crashing down. No one could have imagined that the world’s

greatest stadiums, arenas and concert halls would become empty. No one could have guessed that the world's largest church buildings would be empty on a Sunday. No one could have imagined that Broadway shows would close and theatres would be empty. No one could foresee that the bars and filthy porn shops would be empty. No one could have dreamed that the abortuaries – the killing centers – could be closed. No one could have predicted that the nation's schools – with classes from preschool to Ph.D. programs – would close. No one would have believed that graduations, weddings and even funeral services would be canceled or postponed. No one could have guessed that the casinos in Las Vegas could be empty. No one would have ever imagined that the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC, and the United Nations Building in New York City would shut down their tours. No one knew that the streets of the world's largest cities would be empty. No one has ever seen the nation's freeways virtually empty. No one knew that cruise ships and airplanes would sit idle, with no one in them. But they were shut down. All of them. Almost overnight! What is God doing? He has brought down the idols. I am not saying this to point fingers. I am asking myself the same exact thing you should be asking yourself: "What are my 'idols' that need to go?" God is bringing them down. All of them.

- **HEROES:** We all acknowledge first responders and that is good. But medical personnel are not often as recognized. And never acknowledged are the blue-collar workers who keep this nation moving. I was delighted to see the Wall Street Journal acknowledge this in an article that read, "Truckers Facing Coronavirus Hurdles in Keeping Supply Chains Open" (March 18, 2020). In addition, Daily Mail Australia (March 18, 2020) had a headline that read "Supermarket superheroes: Hardworking employees have been hailed as the 'unsung heroes' of the coronavirus pandemic – as brave workers are compared to firefighters braving bushfires." Finally, lower income workers are getting the accolades they deserve. Everything you have, came to you by a trucker. All the food in your kitchen cabinet was handled by a grocery worker. I have felt for decades that the blue-collar workers are so under-acknowledged. Imagine trying to make it very long without a mechanic, for example.

- **PHYSICAL DISTANCING:** It does not have to be "social" distancing. As one of my friends noted, it is "physical" (six feet) distancing not "social" distancing. If God wanted us to be "socially" distanced, he would not have created iPhones, Livestreaming, FaceTime, Skype, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

- **ISOLATION:** We can't gather together. Think of it. It's one of our fundamental rights – the right to assemble. But we can't. Only in smaller groups. First, smaller than 1,000. Then only 250. Then 10. We can't hug,

embrace or shake hands. We can't even walk together – at least not within six feet of each other. You are to stay in your house. Period. Stay in your house! As I write this, we are not yet legally mandated to stay in our houses, but we are close to it. Possibly by the time you read this, you may be forced to stay home. Martial law! In America? Is that possible? Yes. In the entire world? Yes. How is this possible?

- **SOLITUDE RATHER THAN ISOLATION:** But it does not have to be “isolation.” It can be – positively stated – solitude. Isolation is “aloneness.” Solitude is badly needed quiet time – with oneself. And with God. It is as if God has said, “Enough! Stop. You never stop racing. I'll just shut the entire world down.”
- **PRODUCTIVITY:** All of us have said, “I would do this such and such (some task we have neglected), if I just had more time.” Well now you have the time. During this undesired “pause,” try to focus on those tasks that have been neglected. Most of us need to cull through files, drawers, cabinets and closets for the purpose of disposing of items no longer needed. This could be an unforeseen opportunity to declutter your life, to get rid of so many “things” you do not need. Now is the time to throw away or give away. This unanticipated decluttered schedule can give you an opportunity to have a decluttered home, thus a decluttered life. Seize the moment. Soon you will be back moving at a busy pace. Use this time wisely.
- **ELDERLY:** Many elderly persons have family members checking in on them. But so many do not. Locate the elderly near you and make sure that someone is checking in on them.
- **NEIGHBORS:** To the extent you can, make certain all the persons on your block or in your apartment or your condo complex have each other's emails and cell phone numbers. If possible, set up a text string or a WhatsApp group with all of your cell numbers so you can be in communication often. This vastly reduces the sense of isolation.
- **FAMILIES:** The greatest benefit to this horrific time – and yes, there are benefits to the forced shutdown – are times for families to be together. When “9-11” happened, our youngest two children asked if they could pull mattresses into our bedroom and sleep on the floor in the same room with my wife and me. That type of “clingy-ness” is good. It is not bad. Most parents need more time with their children, and most children need more time with their parents. Well, now you have it.

- **CHILDREN:** With younger children in the home, long times without creative outlet can be profoundly frustrating. Think creatively. Share ideas with each other on how to use all this extra time in fulfilling, productive and even entertaining ways. Remember, parents, decades from now, your children will tell their children about how creative their parents were during the Coronavirus crisis of 2020.

- **EDUCATION:** I don't have young children in my home any more, but when my children were young, part of their education came through homeschooling, absolutely one of the greatest mechanisms for training up children. And biblical I might add. (Tutors can be hired by parents, but education is scripturally the role of the parents.) Suddenly with no warning, all the children are out of school buildings and can be educated where God established the first order of training: the home. It is as if God said, "I support homeschooling, so you all are going to do that now – at least for a while."

- **PAINFUL CANCELATIONS:** In this season, weddings and graduations are impacted. Even funerals can't be done in the normal way. However, this is not the time for surrender, but for creativity. Funerals are now being livestreamed. Not the best, admittedly, but it is certainly better than no memorial service. I heard about a wedding in Israel in which – knowing that they could only have 10 persons in the synagogue, but could have 100 in a grocery store – they moved the wedding to the local grocery store and the man and woman were pronounced husband and wife in the fresh fruit section. (The pictures are online.) That is creative. And they will have an amazing story to tell their future children. Quite possibly a more "normal" wedding renewal experience can be scheduled later. What about graduations? Years ago, when it became obvious that my (now late) wife, who was battling advanced cancer, would be hospitalized during the high school graduations of our two youngest children, the school district worked creatively with us and arranged for a type of private graduation. Regardless of the event, get highly creative. Figure out unusual ways to make events special, regardless of the present circumstances that prohibit normal celebratory events.

- **REST:** Most people – including me – run too hard, too fast. We don't slow down. We overextend. We don't observe God's Sabbath. We violate it, and then we even have the gall to brag about how hard we work or how little sleep we get. God says, "Stop." So He stopped us. 2 Chronicles 36:21 states that "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah." Why seventy years? The classic answer is that Israel had ignored God's Sabbath rest each week for 490 years, thus He reclaimed all

those missed Sabbath rests during the exile. In a sense – a very rough sense – many overextended persons are now forced to take the rest that their body missed. Is that a stretch of the concept? Possibly. But I do know this: You – many of you – are being confined to your homes. Rest.

• **REPENTANCE:** Any time someone becomes sick, there are those who look for the reason God made them sick. But that is not His pattern, nor His ways. Illness, sickness, heartaches, pain, suffering, poverty, tears and death all have one common source: The Evil One, the Enemy, or Satan himself. In contrast, all good things come from the Father. However...however...and this is a “cautious” however, there are times when God can release pestilence upon the land. Is this one of those times? I am not certain. I am careful in any pronouncements. But it certainly appears that this could be a “visitation” – not the kind we like – from the Almighty. Just take one nation – America. What are our national – not personal, but national – sins? For starters, our horrific treatment of those who were captured in Africa and brought here as slaves. Then there are the broken agreements – covenants, actually – with Native Americans that produced a literal “trail of tears.” Then came post-Civil War racial segregation. Then came the slaughter of our pre-born babies. Then the destruction of marriage and the legalized institutionalization of sodomy. And those are just the top-line sins. (Don’t get me wrong. I am not an “America is bad” kind of guy. In fact, America has done more good for our world than any other nation that has ever existed [other than Israel]. I am enormously proud of my country.) Yet America has “collective,” national sins, as do all nations of the world. In a phrase, the world’s nations – and its governments – have overwhelmingly rejected the ways and commandments of Yahweh – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And there is only so much of that which can occur until the wrath of God – yes, He is love, but he has anger too – is released. That is the meaning of this verse – which included “social distancing:” “Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. See, the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed on it; the earth will conceal its slain no longer.” Isaiah 26:20-21 NIV. (Could the reference to “blood” include the slaughter of abortion?) Is this current situation one of those “pestilence” moments? Or is this simply a natural phenomenon? If you are a secularist, you will dismissively choose the latter. If you are spiritually discerning, you will ponder this long and hard ... and then repent.

• **PROTECTION:** On the biblical calendar, we just went through Purim (the Jewish people saved from destruction through the bravery of Esther) – on

Monday evening, March 9 to Tuesday evening, March 10 – and are on our way to Passover (Israel escaping Pharaoh and leaving Egypt) – the evening of Wednesday, April 8 to evening of Thursday, April 16 – two powerful events scripturally. In preparation for Passover, the Israelites placed blood on their doorposts to escape the angel of death. The modern-day equivalent for us today is to participate – with sobriety and careful self-reflection – in the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper. Gather your family. Pray. And then symbolically place “the blood on your doorpost” by the receiving of the bread and the cup. This is not a superstitious act. Nor is it magic. This is a deeply spiritual act that God will bless.

• **HEALING:** If widespread disease does come, be prepared to pray for the sick. After all, that is what we are supposed to do, isn’t it? (I do not mean to promote a book, but several years ago, I wrote *God Still Heals*. The two pages of Appendix B contain a highly informative summary of the book. For more information, Pam@WellVersedWorld.org) Will there be many ill around us? We will soon know. We need to know how to pray for the sick, at all times, but especially in this crisis. This could be the church’s shining moment.

• **PRAYER:** I have noticed the badly needed roles of pastors, prophets and intercessors – in particular – during the last few days. The pastors (referenced above) are moving forward calmly, providing solace for the congregation. The prophets are “seeing” what God is doing. The intercessors are touching heaven. Several nights ago – from 5pm to 6pm – there was a prayer conference call with 5,000 people on it – crying out to God. Immediately following that was another massive prayer call that went from 6pm to 7:45pm. I have not sensed this kind of “intercessional avalanche” since October-November of 2016. It reminded me of the crying out that occurred in the Hebrew Scriptures. On these calls, the intercessors cited Numbers 16:47-49, “So Aaron took the censer as Moses had ordered and ran into the midst of the assembly. And seeing that the plague had begun among the people, he offered the incense and made atonement for the people. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was halted. But those who died from the plague numbered 14,700....” Those praying took their role as figuratively standing between the living and the dead, to see the plague halted. Frequently cited was Joel 2:17, “Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare your people, O LORD...” “Between the porch and the altar” marks the location of crying out to God on behalf of the people. The anguish of those praying on these phone calls was from this important spiritual and figurative location.

• **GOD:** He alone is our protector. I affirm medicine, doctors, nurses and hospitals. But medicine can't save you now. There is no known cure for this – not yet. Medical doctors and nurses can't save you. There aren't enough of them, and they can only do so much in a pandemic, and many of them are getting ill themselves. Hospitals can't save you. In the US, there are 945,000 hospital beds of which only 100,000 are ICU beds. If only 1% of the population of the US needed hospitalization, that would be well over 3 million people. Don't get me wrong. I have no problem using medicine, doctors, nurses and hospitals. In fact, they have been and they will be used by God in this crisis. But let's cut to the chase: Only God can save you now. This is a splendid opportunity to run to Him. Now. This is the moment to reach out to your heavenly Father. Ask for forgiveness of your sins. Invite Jesus to become the epicenter of your life. Ask Him to become your Savior, that is, to save you from the eternal consequences of your sins. Ask Him to become the Lord – in charge – of your life. This is your hope. Once assured that your sins have been forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross, you can walk confidently forward, knowing that regardless of what comes in the future – life or illness, or even death (as it will for all of us eventually) – we can walk in bold confidence that God will see us through this.